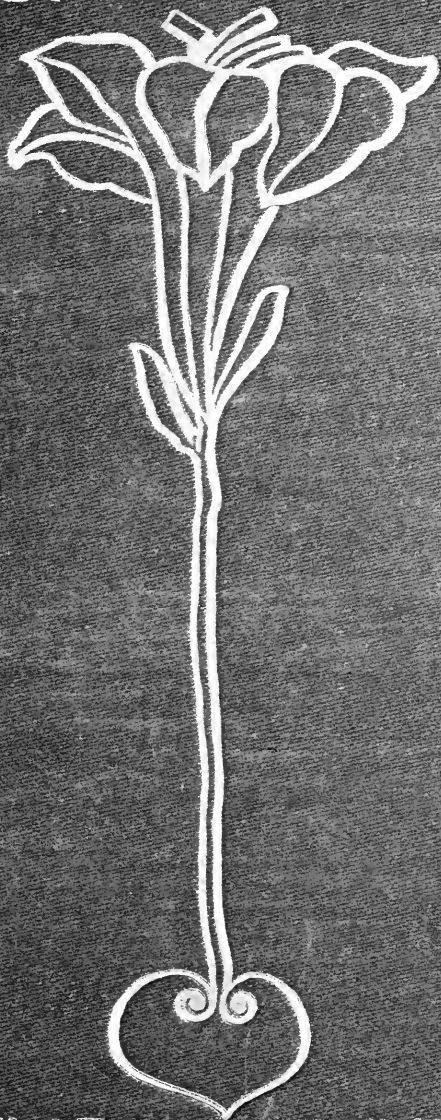


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# A Great Love

BY

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY  
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## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. A CLAIM OF FRIENDSHIP . . . . .	1
II. MISS GAYLORD . . . . .	12
III. THE CARRUTHS . . . . .	27
IV. IN THE MUSIC ROOM . . . . .	44
V. SOCIETY . . . . .	61
VI. A NEW LEAF . . . . .	76
VII. A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY . . . . .	95
VIII. CONFIDENCES . . . . .	113
IX. MISS BEEBE'S QUEST . . . . .	131
X. MISS GAYLORD RECEIVES . . . . .	147
XI. DOUBTS AND FEARS . . . . .	161
XII. THE CONCERT . . . . .	174
XIII. VACATION . . . . .	192
XIV. CLIFF NEST . . . . .	206
XV. SUMMER DAYS . . . . .	220
XVI. THE BETRAYAL . . . . .	238
XVII. MOTHER AND CHILD . . . . .	255
XVIII. BY THE SEA . . . . .	273
XIX. THE ONE QUESTION . . . . .	288
XX. AT SUNSET . . . . .	303



# A GREAT LOVE

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## CHAPTER I

### A CLAIM OF FRIENDSHIP

IN his bachelor apartment in Boston, Willard French lay on the divan, reading. By an original arrangement of cushions his heels were nearly as high as his head, and his body, as it hazily appeared through the cloud of smoke that embowered it, described a semicircle.

The early winter afternoon was dark, and a drop-light cast its beams upon a page that absorbed the young man so that in his luxurious comfort he failed to hear a knock at his door. It was repeated, and at last reached his consciousness.

"Come in," mumbled the reader along his pipe-stem. Instead of obeying, the unseen applicant made a louder plea for entrance. It was Sunday afternoon. French could name with approximate certainty the visitor who might be seeking him.

"What's the matter with you?" he roared, dropping his book. "*Come — in!*"

The door opened, and as the clearing haze revealed the feminine form that confronted him,

French bounded into the middle of the floor, pipe in hand, and stared helplessly at the middle-aged and disgusted face regarding him from under a tightly-curled brown coiffure. The newcomer was dressed in rich fabrics, but she wore ear-rings with drops, and solid bracelets encircled her gloved wrists, in a day when such ornaments were usually relegated to packing-boxes.

"How do you do, Willard French? Pugh! How it smells in here!"

The young man dropped his pipe on the mantelpiece and shook hands mechanically.

"It *is* smoky, Miss Beebe," he said apologetically. "Shan't I open the window?" suiting the action to the word.

"Both windows: do, — so a body can breathe. What do you suppose the inside of your lungs looks like?"

"I can reply with devout gratitude that I don't know, and am not likely to until the X ray is improved upon. My bones are all right, though," he added, smiling at his guest and offering her the most comfortable chair in the room. "I've seen some of those myself. Well, it's a long time since I've met you. There was a period when we were not such unusual Sunday afternoon companions."

"Willard," said Miss Beebe, returning his look earnestly, "you were the smartest and the most mischievous boy in the whole Sunday-school."

The velvet shoulders of the young man's jacket shook. "I give you my word, my first thought when I saw you just now was, 'No card to-day!'"

The visitor nodded her head reminiscently. "I'm afraid I gave you a picture card a great many times when you did n't deserve it," she said seriously.

"My winning ways, eh?"

"No, you were a scamp; but," thoughtfully, "your nails were always so clean."

"Not my fault, you may be sure. How's everybody in Springdale?"

"Everybody's well. Why don't you ever come back and see us?"

"Labor, Miss Lu. Have to keep my brow in a chronic state of perspiration."

"Nonsense!"

"Thanks for your sympathy. How did you find me, if I may ask?"

"Why, you ain't hiding, are you?" Miss Beebe smiled into his smooth-shaven face.

"Well — er — not exactly; but I always calculate to shove a few things under the divan and dust the tea-kettle before I entertain ladies here."

"Oh! you don't mind me, Willard! You better shut those windows, I guess."

"Whose lungs are catching it now?" he asked, as he obeyed. "Better nicotine than pneumonia, eh?"

"Now come here and sit down, for it's getting late, and I'm going to Mrs. Carruth's to tea."

"Oh! Mrs. Carruth told you where I was. Why didn't she send for me to come to you instead of letting you venture into my den?"

"She offered to, but," Miss Beebe winked mysteriously, "I wanted to see you alone."

"Well," French smiled, "that does n't scare me so much as it once would. I'm bigger than you are now."

"Fiddlesticks! I always treated you too well, and you know it! Now," in a business-like tone, "there's another thing that you know. A great many people impose on Mrs. Carruth."

French shook his head. "Don't you believe it! People who try to impose on Mrs. Carruth come out at the little end of the horn. She reads people like a book."

"I know what you mean: but she is philanthropic and generous, genuinely so, and because she is rich, people come to her with every scheme and every perplexity until, if it was n't for principle, I'm sure she'd move to a desert island. Now, I've got a scheme and a perplexity of my own, and of course my first thought was Emeline Carruth: but I said to myself: 'Is n't there something I can do beside saddle Emeline with a new care? Think,' said I, 'is n't there anybody else in Boston but Mrs. Carruth?' So I just ran over in my mind the people I knew, and



especially I tried to think of people in boarding-houses, for of course Althea's got to board; she couldn't very well do anything else, could she? Light housekeeping's one of the biggest burdens a body can shoulder. Don't you think so? Or have n't you had any experience? Well, I thought at last of you."

"Hold on, Miss Lu!" French put his hand to his head. "Won't you go a little slower? I feel as if I were looking at a cinematograph that would n't hold still. Who is Althea?"

"Why, she's the girl, of course, that I want you to look after."

"Oh, I say!" A hunted look came into French's eyes. "I have so many girls to look after already! I have to sit up nights to get through; and there's a waiting-list as long as my arm" —

"Willard French," severely, "I little thought you would n't oblige me!"

"Why, Miss Beebe, anything that I really could do" —

"Well, you really could do this," inexorably, "only I have n't explained to you. Althea Gaylord is the daughter of an old friend of mine who lives in Denver. She wants Althea to come East to study music."

"Chicago's the place!" ejaculated French with conviction. "Chicago's a great musical centre, and so much nearer home. Thomas's Orchestra

every week, musical clubs galore. Telegraph Mrs. Gaylord — wire her before it's too late! I don't mind going right out now. The girl may start."

"Willard French, sit down!" Miss Beebe pulled him forcibly into the chair he was vacating. "Althea's in Springdale already. Now wait. I thought how nice it would be for the child if she could board in the same house you did: some one to speak to at meals, some one to post her letters for her, -- you know the many little things that come up in bad weather" --

"Yes, I know," groaned French.

"Then if she should be ill in the night, some one that she would feel a right to call upon and send for the doctor, or anything like that. All little things, yet making such a difference in a girl's comfort. I've no doubt she'd be happy to mend your clothes in return, and it would be very nice for you."

"No, thank you, Miss Beebe!" with sudden spirit. "No girls rummaging around my room in the daytime, if you please!" Then with a change of tone: "Mrs. Carruth is the person to attend to this, take my word for it. She'll know all the best boarding-places. She's a complete directory in herself."

"No, Willard. I'm capable of doing without Mrs. Carruth. In fact, I have already succeeded. I saw your landlady before I came to you, and luckily she is about to have a room vacated. It

is just the thing for Althea ; right next to yours, which Mrs. Barlow said was fortunate, for then, you being away all day, the piano won't disturb you."

"If it does, I can move!" remarked French doggedly. He had been entertaining visions of bribing his landlady to have no vacant rooms, but now saw escape in that direction cut off.

"I'm sorry you don't coöperate with me more cordially," said Miss Beebe, with gentle reproach. "I looked for better things from an old friend."

"You see when a fellow's so busy"—began her host.

"Althea will be a stranger here," pursued Miss Beebe accusingly. "Dear me!" she rose suddenly. "It's dark as night already, and there are the most awful things in the paper about people being held up before six o'clock!"

"I'll walk over to Mrs. Carruth's with you," said French.

"That's a good boy," responded his friend gratefully. "You see," she continued, as they went out of doors together, "if 't was n't for Pa, I'd come to Boston and stay with Althea myself. I should admire to spend a winter here, but 't ain't fair to try to move Pa at his age, so I'm tied right to Springdale. Then even if he could come, I should n't be free to leave him and go around with her nights, the way you can."

"Indeed I can't! Don't think that for a

minute," returned French warmly. The fact that they were on a public highway freed him from the restraints of hospitality which a little while ago had coerced him. "Everybody's busy here. Ask Mrs. Carruth if I'm likely to have time to be at your protégée's beck and call. Come now, Miss Beebe, you don't know what you're talking about!"

"I trust you, Willard. I've known you, boy and man, for twenty-five years," returned his companion, with unmoved complacency, "and I have a pride about discussing the matter with Mrs. Carruth. She never has had cause, I believe, to consider her old school-friend a hanger-on, and she never shall. Emeline's been loyalty itself to me always, in fact she has to all her old Springdale connections, and I shouldn't be surprised if she would take Althea right into her own splendid house for the winter if I should ask it; but I wouldn't do it for the world. Why, Mrs. Carruth would remember Althea's mother; she was a Springdale girl too."

"Well, *I've* no pride about discussing it with her," remarked French coolly. "In fact, I shall regard Mrs. Carruth in the light of a life preserver."

Miss Beebe appeared to see no threat in this. "Yes," she agreed cheerfully, "if anything should happen to Althea more than ordinary, you could always consult Mrs. Carruth."

The stare which her companion gave her passed unnoticed.

"What a fine girl Margaret has come to be! I hope she and Althea will be great friends."

"Humph!" returned French non-committally.

"Why, you *think* they will, don't you, Willard?"

"How should I know?"

"Well, Margaret Carruth's a kind, friendly girl, is n't she?"

"Sometimes."

"Dear me! Why, she always seems so attractive!"

"Oh, yes, she's that all right. There's a slight mistake in spelling her name. It ought to be M-a-g-n-e-t; but then, there are some clods that don't feel a magnet's attraction, you know."

"Well, you're polite! You can stop calling Althea names right now!"

Here a man advancing in the electric light lifted his hat at sight of French.

"Why, it's Vandyke!" said the latter, stopping and extending his hand. "Miss Beebe, let me introduce Mr. Vandyke. Won't you turn around and join us? Mr. Vandyke is a new-comer in Boston, and I have been telling him he must meet Mrs. Carruth. We are on our way there now, Vandyke. Won't you come?"

"Thank you, but I have an engagement already at the house of one of your friends,—Mrs. Darling."

"Oh, you have!" French laughed, and the stranger regarded him questioningly. "Why do you call her my friend?" asked Willard. "I did n't introduce you there."

"No; but she told me she knew you."

"Indeed she does! All right, then; another time."

"Stunning chap, isn't he?" asked French of his companion, as they strolled on. "And Mrs. Darling's got hold of him already!" he added musingly.

"Humph! She's a cat!" remarked Miss Beebe concisely.

"She? She is all that her name implies," laughed French. "She's a very *chic* woman, let me tell you."

"She *is*!" ejaculated Miss Beebe. "Well, she ain't much like me, then. When I'm sick I don't feel like entertaining anybody; but perhaps that man's a doctor."

French smiled. "No, Vandyke's a lawyer. He might make her will for her, though." But the speaker's own immediate troubles turned his humor to dejection. "When do you return to Springdale, Miss Beebe?"

"To-morrow. I shall send Althea on the last of the week. I don't know as you'd better bring that Mr. Vandyke to see her right away. He's so stern-looking, he'd scare a little thing like Althea."

"Very well. I'll try to hold him back from too sudden and overwhelming attentions to her."

"Now you need n't be sarcastic! First impressions are important. He'd scare me if I was a girl. His eyes are beautiful, but he looks as if he would n't smile for a farm, and he holds his head up as if he'd swallowed the poker; then those short pointed beards always give a face a solemn look,"

"You've been ever so good to bring me over, Willard," she went on, when they reached the Carruth steps. "Ain't you going to come in?"

"No; I'm sorry, but I have an engagement."

"But you were going to come in with that lawyer man," she returned shrewdly.

"Yes. *That* would have been a previous engagement," explained French blandly.

"Oh!" said Miss Beebe. "Good-by, then," shaking hands with him. "I shall hear from you often through Althea. I ain't positively certain yet what day she'll start, but when she gets here," Miss Beebe gave a little satisfied laugh, "just consider yourself engaged to her."

French lifted his hat and turned on his heel precipitately, with a murmur which, fortunately for his ex-Sunday-school teacher, came but confusedly to her ear.

"What was that he said about Althea being a lamb?" she mused as she rang the bell.

## CHAPTER II

### MISS GAYLORD

It was fortunate for Miss Beebe that she was not of a self-distrustful nature: for, as a matter of fact, in her present trip to Boston she had not pleased anybody but herself.

In the first place, Miss Gaylord felt that she ought to have been permitted to go with her and make her own arrangements for her winter campaign. She did not say so, however, for Mrs. Gaylord, while accustomed and resigned to being the victim of her daughter's independence, — perhaps being even a little proud of it, — questioned its effect upon her friends in the more conservative East, and had exhorted Althea to be gently subject to whatever dictum the Beebes chose to issue.

“The Beebes” had been so often quoted to the girl after her mother decided to let her go to Boston, that for Althea the title acquired a vast significance. When she arrived at Springdale and found this potent and awful family to consist of a superannuated gentleman with an overdressed elderly daughter, living quietly in an old-fashioned house, her surprise was great, but unexpressed.



Miss Beebe approved the fastidious neatness of the girl's dress, the smoothness of her uncrimped hair, the demure look in her young face, and the alert, observant expression of her eyes; but the good lady would have been electrified if she had known the effect produced upon the newcomer by the long-respected house of Beebe.

DEAR MA, — I'm here all right (wrote the girl), but I should die if I had to stay in Springdale long. According to what you besought me to do, I practiced talking to the porter all the way on without using any slang. I think I improved him very much by my conversation. So far I haven't frightened anybody here. I shouldn't talk at all, to be on the safe side, if I weren't afraid of going to sleep and snoring, if I kept perfectly still. Miss Beebe is awfully kind, but she's such a moss-back, she would n't let me go to Boston with her to make my arrangements. She doesn't seem to think I'm able to do anything but sit in a high chair and beat the table with a rattle. Such a funny back-number as she is! But she's as kind as she is fussy, and I shall not forget it, etc., etc.

Mrs. Carruth, while her friend Luella was with her, perceived the burden of concealment the latter was carrying; but not until the hour of her departure did Miss Beebe explain herself.

"I have n't told you my errand here, Emeline, because I did n't want to trouble you," she said impressively: "but you remember Lizzie Stewart, who used to go to school with us?"

Mrs. Carruth replying vaguely, Miss Beebe continued: "She married a Gaylord and went to Denver to live. Her daughter is coming to Boston to study music, and I undertook to make the arrangements. I determined not to trouble you, and I have n't, have I?" triumphantly.

"No: but I'm glad your mysterious promenades have meant nothing worse. I thought if you had a trouble so deep that you could n't explain it to me, things were indeed going ill with you."

"Now, Emeline, you have n't worried? I tried to do everything for the best, and I've got board for Althea in the house with Willard French, and I know you'll befriend her if anything comes up: but still, I don't want you to feel any burden about her. She's a sensible, quiet little thing, and her life ought to be studying and sleeping, with some outdoor exercise. I shall start her off with plenty of good advice."

This Miss Beebe did, previously laying before Althea with much explicitness the results of her researches in conservatory and boarding-place. She even handed to the girl her tickets for the symphony rehearsals.

"Now I think I've seen to everything," she

finished, "except renting your piano. I thought most likely you 'd rather pick it out yourself."

"That was very thoughtful of yôu, Miss Beebe," returned the circumspect Althea, whose wings began to flutter like those of the caged bird who sees a chance of escape.

"Now I've told you not to appeal to Mrs. Carruth unless it's necessary. You must let me help you as much as I can at this distance; but you understand about the Carruths, don't you?"

Althea nodded, and groaned in spirit. If she did not understand, it was not from any failure on Miss Beebe's part to enlarge upon the riches, the position, the importance, and the responsibilities of the Carruths, mother and daughter.

"And oh! I forgot to tell you about Mr. French! I selected his boarding-place for you on purpose, so that you should n't be alone in a strange land."

"But I like to be alone," said Althea restively. "If I did n't, I should n't have left home." Her speech was always deliberate, with a reposeful sort of drawl which amused her hostess.

"Yes, my dear, I know; but you have n't tried it, and in case of sickness" —

"In case of sickness I don't know what a man could do for me."

"Why, go for the doctor, of course, or any other errand you need done."

Althea smiled. "What sort of disposition has Mr. French?"

"A good average disposition. I knew him all his life till he went to college, and Willard's a nice boy."

"Boy!" ejaculated Althea. "How old is my kind guardian?"

"Well, let's see. He must be about twenty-six now."

"Great — I mean, dear me!" The girl reddened. "Did you tell him his prospects?"

"What do you mean?"

"That he was expected to run errands for me?"

"I gave him a general idea of what I expected of him."

"How did he take it?"

"Oh, very well," Miss Beebe hesitated. She seemed all at once to realize Willard's unresponsiveness in clearer light. "At any rate," she continued, with an air of certainty, "there's no doubt that Mr. French is a gentleman. Of course, he has his faults. For one thing, he smokes a pipe; but he comes of a good family, and you'll find he'll never refuse you."

"Well, I hope, myself, it won't come to that," remarked Althea dryly. "I'm sure you've been very good, Miss Beebe, and provided for every possible emergency. I feel that each day that passes now before I get to my work is so much time wasted, so I think I'd better go right on to Boston, if you don't mind."

“ Well, my dear, please yourself. You must write to me soon. I hope you and Margaret Carruth will be great friends; but still, you must n’t expect anything, for she is *so* sought after! My!” Miss Beebe clasped her ringed hands and cast up her eyes to convey how totally words failed her.

“ If she only *could* understand that all I want is to be let alone!” thought Althea, drawing exultant breaths when she found herself on the train speeding toward the longed-for haven. “ What do I care for her old Carruths? I guess I have friends of my own, even if I did n’t choose to tell her about them; but I don’t mean to look Molly up. I’m going to be a hermit just as long as it amuses me. That poor Frenchman! I wonder if he thinks I’m like Luella? It wouldn’t be such bad fun to pretend I was! But no, Althea, no tricks. You’re not off on a lark. This is a business trip.”

She had in her purse an elaborate description of the car which would convey her to Mrs. Barlow’s boarding-house, but after standing on the sidewalk in front of the Boston and Albany Station and watching the cars go by until her brain reeled and her arm ached with the load of her heavy bag, her patience evaporated and she decided to take a cab.

As she approached the vehicle, a man darted out from a side entrance to the station and hurried toward the same conveyance, so that at the

carriage they met. He started, drew back, and raised his hat, murmuring an apology. Then quickly perceiving the weight of her bag,—

“Allow me,” he said, and taking it, politely held open the carriage door, just as the driver was jumping down from his box to perform the same office.

Althea thanked the stranger with a characteristic little off-hand nod. “Tell me what I ought to pay him, will you?” she asked.

“It depends on where you are going,” replied the man.

Althea looked younger than her twenty-one years, and the heavy bag had paled her cheeks.

“I have the address right here,” she said, opening her purse.

Her face grew blank as she searched from compartment to compartment in vain.

“Why, what an idea! I had it. I’m sure I had it when I started. Why” — the girl became suddenly conscious that she was detaining a stranger in her service as porter. “Oh, excuse me! Please put down that grip. Thank you. I’m sorry to have troubled you. I shall have to go and look in a directory.” She stepped out of the cab, and the driver’s face fell. He touched his hat to the young man. “Shall I wait for you and the lady, sir, or shall I drive you over to the drug-store for the directory?”

The stranger was still holding Althea’s bag.

"That will be the best way, I think?" he suggested to the girl.

"Yes, so it will. That grip's awfully heavy. I'll never put books in it again. Just set it inside, please. I'm ever so much obliged."

The young man hesitated. "I think I had better help you look up your destination, if you are a stranger in Boston."

"Why, that would be an imposition!" said Althea: but the cab-driver did n't think so. He closed the door with alacrity upon his two fares and sprang to his place.

"Damsels in distress ought to have gone out of fashion," continued Althea. "Girl bachelors should be able to look out for themselves. I never shall understand how I mislaid that card — the most important thing of all!"

The cab drew up before the neighboring drug-store. "There is probably no need for you to get out," said her escort, "if you will tell me as much as you remember of the address."

"Why, it's a Mrs. Barlow who keeps a boarding-house," said Miss Gaylord helplessly. "I may have to drive around all day! Did you ever hear of anything so absurd?"

Her friend in need was standing on the sidewalk, his hand resting on the open cab door. Althea's quick observant glance had already pronounced him good style, and she would consider the adventure great fun when it was all over. A curious look came into his eyes.

"Would you know the name of the street if you heard it?"

"Perhaps," doubtfully.

"Was it Newbury Street?"

"That's *it*!" Althea's cheeks flushed in her relief as she put up her gloved hand in a quick gesture.

She looked to see her companion hurry off to the directory. Instead, he leaned toward the driver and said something inaudible to her. Then, before she could divine his intention, he stepped back into the cab, slammed the door, and they started off at a rattling pace.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed the girl, dismayed.

"I know where the place is," replied her companion.

"But why are you coming too?"

"Because it is my duty," was the response, accompanied by an amused smile which was far from reassuring.

All sorts of vague terrors raced through Althea's brain. All the grim stories of tragedies in the great cities, all the hints of pitfalls that await young girls, took the strength from her limbs. The clean-shaven face she had thought so trustworthy took a sinister aspect in her eyes. Her heart beat in her throat.

"If you are a gentleman, you will stop this cab!" she said breathlessly.



Immediately her escort put his head out the window and gave an order. The cab drew up by the sidewalk.

"Thank you," said the girl, in surprise and relief. "Now leave me."

"But I want to go to Mrs. Barlow's too. It will save a lot of time for me. I gave up the cab to you; you might be generous."

Her hand sought the carriage-door, and her escort saw it tremble. His manner suddenly changed. He lifted his hat courteously. "Pardon me, Miss Gaylord. I didn't mean to startle you. I live at Mrs. Barlow's, and you are expected."

Althea regarded him wide-eyed and bit her lip. She made an effort to regain her sang-froid.

"Dear me!" she said at last. "I wonder if you're the Frenchman?"

"I am Willard French, at your service."

"At my service? So I've understood. So you were just too late to catch your train out of town. Poor man!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, of course I expected you would go, after Miss Beebe told you her plans for making home happy for you."

"Not at all," returned French coolly. "I am living up to all the requirements. I met you at the station, didn't I?"

"I shall never like you," remarked Althea.

"That grieves me; but hadn't we better let this man go on?"

"Why, of course! There is no sense in staying here all day! You frightened me nearly to death. Do you know it?" she added, when they were once more under way.

"I apologize humbly. Upon my word, I do. Your bag is revenging you. It is lying on my foot. Do you always read such heavy books, Miss Gaylord?"

He stooped and removed the offending satchel.

"The heaviest one in there is a harmony book. I'm going to study harmony. Are you musical?"

"Very."

"I'm so glad! Do you play or sing, or both?"

"No, I don't sing; but I used to play a little on the jews-harp," said French modestly.

"Well, that's better than the other kind of a harp, I think," rejoined Athena coolly. "I don't see any sense in the harp. Kind of a half-baked thing anyway. Always looks to me like a grand piano with its clothes off, and sounds like one."

"Miss Gaylord! Where is your poetry?"

"Oh, I'm about as poetical as you are musical, I guess. Why did you say you were musical?"

"Because I must get back into your good graces somehow, after making you believe that I was abducting you."

"First impressions are strong," admitted Althea. "Do you go to the Symphony Concerts?"

French hesitated before replying. He might be expected to sacrifice an evening every week to escorting this feminine-looking, brusque, blunt paradox of a girl. "Sometimes," he replied cautiously.

"Oh, cheer up!" remarked Althea, her serious countenance breaking into a smile. "My tickets are for the matinées."

"Miss Gaylord!" protested French, coloring.

"Don't cheat yourself," remarked the girl nonchalantly. "I'm always able to see through a millstone, whether it has a hole in it or not, and that one was dead easy. However," she gazed portentously at French, and spoke with impressive slowness, "in case of illness, as Miss Beebe informed you, you will be expected to hustle."

"She didn't put it that way, exactly."

"I suppose *you* aren't afraid of slang, are you?" Miss Gaylord's tone changed to one of curiosity. "I know that east of the Alleghenies it is against the law for women, children, and idiots to hear slang, and I've swallowed so much since I came to Springdale that unless I am allowed to work some of it off, there's no telling but you *will* be called up in the night, though I'm never ill in Colorado, at home — in God's country." The girl suddenly turned her head aside. French felt sympathy for her probable homesickness.

"I hope you won't be, here," he remarked rather lamely.

"Naturally you do," she answered in her usual tone. "That's one thing I decided you would be good for, though, as soon as I heard of you. I thought you would make a good safety-valve when I found myself drowning in blue blood, or transfixed by eye-glasses. Pardon the mixed metaphor. You don't wear eye-glasses, do you?"

"Sometimes." French drew a pair from an inside pocket and put them on. "When I wish to intimidate you, I shall."

Miss Gaylord shrugged her shoulders. "Men never intimidate me. Don't flatter yourself."

French smiled, but forbore from reminding her of the scene a few minutes ago.

"Oh, say!" she added anxiously, "put me on to the Carruths, will you?"

He raised his eyebrows.

"Pshaw!" she ejaculated. "I leave it to you if it isn't better to say it that way? Don't we know that time is money? Listen here: Mr. French, will you kindly describe for me the characteristics of the Carruth family, that I may know what to expect when I meet them, and may govern my behavior accordingly?" Miss Gaylord gave a gasp of exhaustion and leaned back in a corner of the cab.

"I prefer that putting from your sweet lips, fair lady."

"Gramercy, Sire. Go on, then. I should judge from Miss Beebe's description that Mrs. Carruth was a cross between a Hindoo idol and a Florence Nightingale, and that Miss Carruth was in danger of sprouting a pair of wings and leaving an earth too earthy for the touch of her number fives."

"They are the most charming people I know," said French gravely.

"Oh! Is that what you call a description?"

"But you will see them so soon," suggested French.

"Not unless they see me first," returned Althea, with conviction. "You must understand even in this short time how we should hate each other."

"The Carruths could n't hate anybody."

"Fishes! I knew it! Well," with a change of tone. "I shan't have any time for society, — no time at all. You haven't an idea how I'm going to work."

"That's the right student spirit," remarked French encouragingly. It was a statement he heard with an unbreathed sigh of relief.

"I'm going to make Dad glad he knows me when I get back."

"Bravo!"

"And I'm going to talk to Ma in nothing but words of four syllables."

"You can practice on me any time."

"So you see I shan't have time to philander."

"Evidently."

"I'm not even going to hunt up the people here that I do like."

"You have friends here, then?" French told himself that his prospects were brightening.

"Yes, one at least. There was a Boston lady I met at Colorado Springs. I tell you, she was a corker! No eye-glasses about her. Well, she was really a New York girl, but her husband's a Boston man. I don't think she liked him any better for that, either. She was awfully nice to me. Mrs. Darling was her name. Molly Darling, we all called her. I think she'd like to see me."

French bit the end of his tongue in his sudden determination not to disclose his acquaintance with the vivacious Molly; and although his second thought was one of amusement at the guardianship implied by this reservation, he did not change his mind.

The cab drew up before a house in a stone block.

"Here we are," he remarked.

"Mrs. Barlow'll be frightened. She'll think you're bringing home your bride," said Althea, in her nonchalant drawl.

"My bride shan't pack any such bag as this for me to carry," replied French, as he helped her out.

"See how wise I am not to marry you?" returned Miss Gaylord calmly.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CARRUTHS

WOMEN were always aware of Burton Vandyke if he was in the room with them, and it had piqued Mrs. Darling to feel that on the two occasions of their meeting he had been only half aware of her. So, as even on a cursory view it was evident that he would be a creditable addition to her train, she asked him to Sunday afternoon tea. If the young lawyer from Philadelphia did not admire her at the tea-table, those poetical eyes of his belied him, and his density would be scarcely worth enlightening.

She sat opposite him to-day near the open fire in her charming apartment, in a violet gown decorated with gold that matched her hair, and drank from a violet cup with gold bands, looking at him as she talked, to see if his appreciation of symphonies in color was sufficient to repay her for arranging them.

Vandyke was very comfortable. The room was not hot, and the tea was. He enjoyed the picture presented by his pretty hostess, and he wondered vaguely why French had chuckled over the fact of his invitation. No doubt Mrs. Darling was much

admired: but there was a Mr. Darling. Vandyke, in his systematic fashion, had taken mental notes concerning the new friends he was making, and he remembered this.

"I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting your husband," he remarked.

"No," replied his hostess. "The pleasure of meeting Mr. Darling in Boston is a very spasmodic one. He has to travel a great deal. To-day, I believe, he is in your city."

Vandyke sighed. "I envy him."

"What an ungallant speech!" said his hostess, smiling archly. "What a stupid!" she was thinking. "Let me render good for evil in another cup of tea. It *is* good," she continued, with a pretty air of vanity, "even if we're not in Philadelphia."

Her guest smiled. "It is perfect," he responded.

"Are you really homesick, Mr. Vandyke?" she went on, after he had taken the re-filled cup; and her tone invited confidence and promised the sweetest sympathy.

"No, I'm only a stranger here with a strong attachment for my native city. — I can't say for my home. That was broken up long ago."

"But you have brothers and sisters?"

"Not a sister. I wish I had."

"Then there is some one there dearer than a sister, else you wouldn't be sighing for the provinces in the hub of the universe. Come, confess."



Vandyke met her direct, smiling gaze with one as direct, but grave. "There are no ladies in Philadelphia who make better tea than this," he said, then drank.

Mrs. Darling tossed her fluffy head. "You evidently have not come to the point of needing a confidante," she remarked. "When you do, I am ready. The fact is, I'm such an experienced repository for secrets that if it were n't for my shocking memory I should be in danger of something or other on the brain. Why, even Margaret Carruth confided in me the other day — of course you have met the Carruths."

"No, not yet. I wish to do so. Mr. French has promised to take me to one of their Friday evenings."

"My husband is a relative of the family, and one of Mrs. Carruth's ardent admirers. He says her at-homes are so really homelike that they are irresistible. Mrs. Carruth's pose, you must know, is the unconventional."

"Yes; I have been told that even the most formal functions at her house are relieved by a certain informality."

"Indeed they are! Of course, Mrs. Carruth can do what lesser lights would not venture upon. I was telling Willard French the other night that I never go to one of her evenings without expecting to see her bring out the darning-basket, and he said that if he only might put his socks in it,

he wished she would. "That is all you men care for the conventionalities of life!"

Vandyke nodded as he set his teacup on a little stand. "To a man conscious of his own stiffness and inaptitude for society, all that sounds very attractive," he returned.

"Well, he has sense enough to know it, anyway," thought Mrs. Darling. "What nonsense!" she said lightly.

"No," gravely. "I seem to have been studying all my life, and I like books."

"And I suppose you thought that in coming to Boston you had found an intellectual heaven: and here you are, drinking tea with poor little me, who doesn't know one book from another!" The hostess's merry laugh made her guest smile.

"Who is posing now, Mrs. Darling? Here is one of my best friends," and the guest took from the table a copy of "The Intellectual Life."

"Oh, that is some of my husband's property that has strayed in here."

"You would better make its acquaintance, now it has come. I assure you, you never entertained a guest who would better repay you."

"Really?" doubtfully. "Why, it is only a lot of letters! I glanced at it while I was waiting for you. Beside," decidedly. "Boston, more than any city in the country, needs a number of conscientiously ignorant women to maintain some sort of balance. Don't tempt me. I will give you a

feast of rarebit and flow of tea whenever you like, but for the other sort you will have to go to — well, say to the Carruths’.”

“I fancy he will get on with them swimmingly,” she yawned to herself, after he had taken his departure; then she brightened, for a couple of young men were announced, to whom she gave an enthusiastic audience in the interests of a cotillion which was to be danced for charity during the following month.

A few days afterward, as Mrs. Darling, in the snuggest of tailor gowns, was tripping down Washington Street, she was accosted and stopped by a girl whom at first she did not recognize.

“What luck!” exclaimed Althea. “If I had tried to find you it would have been like hunting for a needle in a haymow, and at first I made up my mind I would n’t, for I thought I’d work better if I did n’t know anybody here; but it’s sort of forlorn, after all, and a familiar face looks so good. How are you, Molly, asthore?”

“Why, it is Miss Gaylord,” returned Mrs. Darling, without enthusiasm. “No wonder I did n’t know you at first, — so far from home.”

Her tone was an antidote to cordiality. Althea felt flung back upon herself with a shock.

“What are you working at, pray?” went on the elder woman.

“The piano,” replied the girl, with a change of manner. “I dare say you’ve forgotten my ambi-

tion to come to Boston for my music." The effusive promises which her volatile friend had held out in the event of such a possibility were still vivid in the young girl's mind, and now returned vaguely and annoyingly to Mrs. Darling.

"Yes, you did speak of it. Well, I'm glad you could carry out your plan; but I'm sure you'll get tired of being so far from home. Where are you staying?"

"Oh, in a boarding-house up near the library," replied Althea, her careless tone covering a proudly beating heart.

"And then I said good-by and left her," Miss Gaylord told French that night in the parlor after dinner, where she was giving him an account of the meeting, "and she never tried to detain me, or asked me my number, or anything."

"H'm!" granted French sympathetically. He saw by Althea's expression that she was not nearly through, and that there was no need for him to say anything as yet.

"And if you knew the way that woman used to go on over me at the Springs, and the promises she made if I ever came to Boston! I introduced her to a lot of people she liked, and she made use of me and our carriage to her heart's content. Oh! it makes my blood boil to think of it! At first this afternoon when she was so cool, I thought she was hurt that I hadn't let her know I was coming!" Althea gave a bitter little laugh.

"No, it was just because she didn't want any responsibility of a lonely girl. Well, Ma'll be glad, and so will Dad. They didn't like her goings-on at all. I tell you," — Miss Gaylord paused, and gave a little solemn, worldly-wise wink, which always amused French, even while he wished she would n't do it, — "that woman is a terror! She flirts like everything!"

"Small loss, then," said French. "What did you say her name is?"

"Darling — Mrs. Darling."

"Blonde?"

"Yes; natural, she says. I'll believe it to accommodate her."

"Mrs. Darling is a friend of mine," remarked French quietly.

"Oh, *say!*" ejaculated Althea, dismayed.

"No harm done," said French.

"There is too, harm," returned Althea indignantly. "Did you think she was a terror, before?"

"Oh, Miss Gaylord!" protested the young man.

"Well, perhaps she is n't, in Boston. Any way, I was a jay to say so much before I knew. You must n't think any the less of her. Now, promise me."

French gave the speaker a kind, ironical smile. "You are afraid you have injured the lady? That is nice of you."

"It's only decent!" flashed Althea. "I ought to have thought: but it's so hard not to have anybody to boil over to. You must remember I was angry. I used to think Mrs. Darling was fine, and she -- she fixed a hat for me once," finished the girl, trying desperately to produce facts to counteract the harm she might have done.

"That's all right," said French consolingly. "It's to-morrow you dine at the Carruths', is n't it? Well, don't speak of her there, for she is a connection of theirs."

"You don't suppose I'm going *around* talking about her, do you?" retorted the girl warmly: then the young face became dejected. "Do you think Mrs. Carruth will feel it her duty to ask me there much?" she added.

"I'm sure she'll let you do as you like. That is her way."

"Oh, I shall be so glad when it's over," sighed Althea. "If I had seen them when they came to call, it wouldn't be quite so hard: but the idea of going solemnly up to that solemn house, and meeting those solemn strangers, and eating their solemn dinner, and staying to their solemn at-home in the solemn evening, almost kills me. If you weren't such a prosy old prude, we could have a rarebit and a rattling tune and some fun when we came home: but I know how it will be. I shall have to creep solemnly upstairs with a solemn good-night, and go solemnly to bed!"

"But, Miss Althea," pleaded French, "in a boarding-house — no chaperone, you know."

"Of course I know. You've told me enough times. Say, I feel just dreadfully about Mrs. Darling," the girl continued, reverting to the old subject. "It makes me furious to think I called her 'Molly.' She used to call me 'Allie' and make such a fuss over me, and to-day you should have heard the stiff way she said 'Miss Gaylord'! Do you know her husband? Isn't he the dearest man? He was out at the Springs for a few days, and Mrs. Darling had been carrying on so, I supposed her husband must be a kind of nobody, and that perhaps she was desperately unhappy; so when Mr. Darling came, we were all amazed, and the minute I saw her alone I said: 'Well, what's the matter with *your* husband?' She sort of laughed, and I told her she was a big jay to want anything more than that."

French smiled. "Possibly the compliment was too subtle for Mrs. Darling to grasp. Perhaps you turned from 'Allie' into 'Miss Gaylord' right then and there."

"Not a bit of it. She was flattered that I admired him. She went on to tell how he worshiped her, and could n't bear to have her out of his sight a minute, and all the rest of it."

"She's right, there, I think. She has n't much sense, — that's all that is the matter with Mrs. Darling."

"Oh, that *is* all," agreed Althea eagerly. "When I said she was a terror, I meant that she was vain and flighty. You understand, don't you?"

French assured her that he understood. The picture of Althea, honest, transparent child as he was discovering her to be, posing as the defender of Molly Darling, touched his sense of humor.

The next afternoon found Miss Gaylord in an irreproachable costume, with a tightly-rolled umbrella in a hand cold from apprehension, approaching the Carruth mansion.

To the Carruths her advent was one of the events in the series of the day's duties. Mother and daughter had her ticketed as one of the numerous individuals who had a claim upon them, but up to the hour of her arrival they had not had time to think about her at all.

Nevertheless, they always had their data ready, and as soon as Miss Gaylord was announced, Springdale, Denver, and Miss Beebe succeeded the interests of the reception they had that day given for a strange pianist who was seeking a foothold in the city.

Althea, waiting in a cosy reception-room whose cabinet of rich and strange curios seemed to menace her with an air of alien erudition, was still cold of hands when a girl but little older than herself entered and came toward her with a greeting.



"Mother will be here at once, Miss Gaylord. She was called to the telephone just before you came in. Telephones are slave-drivers, are n't they?"

"Yes, but they are a great convenience," replied Althea, always slow of speech, but now determined to take plenty of time for each platitude. "Pooh! Miss Carruth is n't such hot stuff," she was saying to herself uneasily, under the kindly directness of Margaret's gray eyes.

"I understand that in the West electrical conveniences are more common and less expensive than in the East, — that all the small towns have them."

"Yes, they do."

"That is quite different from New England, you know. Ah, mother is released," added Margaret, as a lady entered the room.

Mrs. Carruth's frank face, under its smoothly parted hair, wore a little smile of welcome as Althea rose to meet her.

"We were sorry not to find you the other day, Miss Gaylord. I wanted to make sure that you were comfortable in your new quarters, but now you will tell us all about it, and we can become acquainted."

Althea went upstairs with them to take off her hat and jacket, and Mrs. Carruth continued: "I am told that your mother was a schoolmate of mine. It must have been in our childhood, for I don't remember her; but I think Springdale folk

should cling together, whether they be birds of a feather or not."

"Why should I be afraid of these people?" thought Althea stoutly. "They're a great deal plainer in their ways than Mrs. Darling."

Miss Gaylord's father was a rich man, and she was accustomed to luxuries. There was a difference here, however, and the Western girl had eyes to perceive it. She resented while she wondered at the fact that these two women, in the fine simplicity of their house dress and the refinement and frankness expressed in each one of their attitudes and words, should be objects of awe to her, while their home seemed as naturally their rich and noble setting as if it had grown into being to suit their needs.

"Birds of a feather, indeed!" Althea only wished she were a bird. How quickly she would fly out of this atmosphere! She called it "prosy."

"How do you find it at Mrs. Barlow's?" asked Mrs. Carruth, when the three were again downstairs, sitting around an open fire. The lights were turned low. The hostess perceived that a little effort would be required to break down the barrier about this shy, stiff stranger, and this was one of her ways and means.

"It does very well," replied Althea.

"But you should be really comfortable. Mr. French gives the house a good word: but a man's requirements are different."

"Yes, he likes it. You know, Miss Booby — Oh" — Althea's very ears grew crimson in the merciful twilight, "I *meant* to say Miss Beebe — truly" —

Mrs. Carruth laughed. "That is all right, my dear. I'm sure you did."

"She has been awfully kind to me," exclaimed Althea, "and I shall always thank her, even if she did tell Mr. French — I don't know as it's worth speaking of, but she told him to take care of me. Such ro — so needless, you know, and yet I wouldn't hurt her feelings for anything in this world!"

"I understand," said Mrs. Carruth kindly. "I think Miss Beebe imagines that Mr. French is still a boy. I'm sure you find him a kind friend, though."

"Oh, yes," returned Althea virtuously, sure here of her ground. "He's awfully particular."

"Particular in what way?"

"Oh, talks to me so formally at the table, and won't come into my room, and everything like that. You know I have a folding-bed and my piano, and some pictures around, and it's a very decent sitting-room; and yet Mr. French won't come in there and sit down. I tell him he must read columns of advice to young girls in ladies' journals." Here the speaker noted that Margaret Carruth, sitting on her mother's other side, changed the position of her hand-screen. A hot suspicion

flashed through Althea. "Supposing this cool, high-bred girl with the thoughtful eyes were laughing, not with, but at her!"

Mrs. Carruth spoke at once: "Does it happen that you have no friends in Boston except ourselves?"

Miss Gaylord's honesty made her halt a second, even in her embarrassment: but deciding that Mrs. Darling could not in any sense be considered a friend, she replied in the negative.

"You are here for the sake of studying the piano, aren't you?" asked Margaret, and her pleasant voice had no hint of a laugh. "Who is your teacher?"

Althea mentioned a well-known name, and Margaret smiled across at her with sympathy. "You will enjoy him. I have studied with him. He is a pupil of Raif."

"Who is that? Because I'll go to him if he's any better."

"Raif is in Berlin."

"Oh, yes." Althea leaned back again. "If I do well here, I think Dad—my father will let me go over there later."

"You are very much interested, then?"

"Yes," returned Miss Gaylord, not trusting her unruly tongue to venture beyond the monosyllable on a subject upon which her feelings might carry her away.

After dinner she asked Margaret to play to

her; but despite the beauty of music and performance, she did not lose that peculiar combination of constraint and oppression commonly supposed to compose the sensations of a fish out of water.

Mrs. Carruth had some needlework in her hand by a lamp-lit table, when the guests of the evening began to drop in. At first the comers were old friends, and they clustered about her in social fashion, while the girls remained in the music-room, where Margaret observed that Althea's impassive face seemed at last to drop its mask and gain expression for the first time.

That day Burton Vandyke had received a note from Mrs. Darling suggesting that as she was going to the Carruths' that evening, and as Willard French was a will-o'-the-wisp whom no sane person would be beguiled into counting upon, wouldn't Mr. Vandyke like to accompany her, etc., etc.

Mr. Vandyke would and did, and as Margaret Carruth came to the close of Chopin's rippling *Fantasie Impromptu*, both girls recognized a sweet shrill voice talking in the next room.

"Cousin Emeline, I have brought you a willing captive," it said. "I can't do anything with him, and you will understand it when I tell you that he likes *books*!"

Both girls could picture the bewitching airs which accompanied this speech, though neither suspected the other's thoughts. Althea's face

hardened again, and the warmth in Margaret's died out.

A man's voice followed: "I like a great many other things too," it said; and in a minute Mrs. Carruth came into the music-room, accompanied by a tall stranger in whose eyes was a kindly, eager look of expectancy, as of one who finds himself crossing the threshold of an anticipated pleasure.

"Margaret, I want to introduce Mr. Vandyke to you. My daughter, Mr. Vandyke; and our friend, Miss Gaylord, who is studying music here."

"It was you I heard playing, then," he said to Althea, regarding her with a concentration of interest whose life she cut short.

"No indeed! It was Miss Carruth."

He abruptly turned to Margaret. "Must you stop?" for she was leaving the piano.

"No indeed! Don't stop, fair, pale Margaret! How do you do this evening?" Mrs. Darling glided forward and kissed Miss Carruth's cheek. "My cousin plays divinely, Mr. Vandyke. I can't appreciate half the things she does, but then, you know my conscientious scruples against learning— Why, Miss Gaylord!"

The speaker suddenly discovered Althea, who had been accidentally screened from her by Vandyke's broad shoulder, and she stopped stock-still in genuine amazement. Her thoughts flew swiftly enough, however.

To be or not to be as cool as she had been yesterday — that was the question.

“You know Miss Gaylord?” said Margaret, with surprise: then turning toward Althea with a smile: “I understood you to say you had no friends in Boston.”

“Yes, that ‘s what I said,” drawled the girl. “I met Mrs. Darling last year during her Western trip, and I remember her perfectly; but I had no idea her memory would be so good.”

There was a sudden sound of coughing at the door of the music-room. Willard French had arrived in time to see this meeting, and he retreated momentarily.

Althea recognized and followed him to a remote quiet corner of the hall.

“Bravo!” said French. “It ‘s a fine command of language you have, Miss Gaylord.”

She looked up at him. “I ‘ve been talking that way three and one-half hours,” she declared, with impressive slowness. “I ‘m nearly dead!”

“Do you mean to come often?” inquired French, highly entertained.

She closed one eye with the utmost gravity. “Not on your tintype!” she returned.

## CHAPTER IV

### IN THE MUSIC-ROOM

Mrs. DARLING looked after Althea as she left the room, a good deal taken aback by the girl's promptness in becoming mistress of the situation. Then she turned to Margaret.

"Your mother's fondness for picking up curios leads her to great lengths, it seems to me. How does this wild and woolly specimen happen to be here?"

Miss Carruth flushed. "Miss Gaylord is our guest," she returned, in a simple and unreluctant manner which Vandyke noted.

"So I see; but how does it happen?" pursued Mrs. Darling, with a frank impertinence all her own.

"She comes, introduced to us by our old friend, Miss Beebe."

The other laughed. "What an amusing combination! Althea Gaylord and the fair Luella! Well, it's very astonishing to find the girl here. She and her people were very civil to me at Colorado Springs," added the speaker carelessly. "I must talk with her later on."

Meantime Willard French had introduced Althea



to a number of his acquaintances, and in spite of her despairing glances had left her tête-à-tête with a woman physician who wore spectacles.

He found Mrs. Carruth disengaged for a moment. "What is your verdict on Miss Beebe's protégée?" he asked.

The hostess regarded him thoughtfully.

"Poor little thing!" she said compassionately.

"Why?" asked the young man, with genuine curiosity.

"I believe she is homesick without being willing to confess it. Don't you think so?"

"I had n't perceived it."

"She could n't be so shy and stiff and given to monosyllables otherwise. She seems a very self-contained, reserved girl."

French nodded. "And you pity her because you think she is uninteresting? I see."

"I pity you too, a little," said Mrs. Carruth, with a significant smile.

"Because I am uninteresting?" French reflected the smile.

"Of course I don't know how much responsibility you feel in the matter," added his hostess.

"It does n't weigh on me. Miss Gaylord is great fun."

"Great fun!" repeated Mrs. Carruth. "Why, Willard! Your taste must be changing!"

He laughed at the blankness of surprise in her face. "You don't know her yet," he remarked.

"Evidently — for I know you. Well, I must reconstruct my first impression." Mrs. Carruth turned to where Althea, unadaptable, bored, helpless, was enduring fate and appearing to listen to a learned lady who was relating statistics concerning a stone which, forming at some period B. C., had come down through the centuries to rest in Mrs. Carruth's cabinet.

French followed her glance and laughed again, — a chuckle of such hearty appreciation that Mrs. Carruth regarded him, mystified. "You evidently know some very good joke, Willard," she said at last. "If you aren't ready to share it yet, tell me if you know anything about that heroic-looking creature Mrs. Darling has brought us."

"Vandyke? Yes. I meant to bring him myself to-night, but Mrs. Darling got ahead of me. He has letters of introduction from Philadelphia, and has settled here. He is a lawyer, and has a first-rate position with a corporation, and is going to make a success of it. In the little I've seen of him he seems to want to be sociable, without exactly knowing how. Does n't smoke, for instance — mistake number one. Grave sort of a chap, and watches people closely, as if he were studying a lesson. 'Is that the way you do it?' he seems to be saying. I fancy he hasn't gone about much. Well, he has fallen into the hands of somebody who will show him the ropes."

Mrs. Carruth returned the humorous glance

thoughtfully. One saw the power of a leader in her face when she looked thus.

"If his appearance does n't belie him, he will not be easily influenced," she remarked.

"Except along lines where he wishes to be led," added French.

"You say he is really unsophisticated in superficial things?"

"Oh well, he knows which fork to use; but one can see he has taken himself seriously always, and kept his brain busy. He doesn't dance, for instance."

"Then Mrs. Darling will not have much use for him," suggested Mrs. Carruth.

"Humph! Have you happened to notice his eyes, or his walk, or the set of his head on his shoulders? Mrs. Darling is a connoisseur."

"Let us not leave him to her, then, Willard — and — we must n't talk about her," said Mrs. Carruth hastily.

French smiled reminiscently. "Miss Gaylord knew Mrs. Darling in the West, and happening to meet her on the street here yesterday, the latter snubbed her, and just a minute ago your shy little friend got back at her in great shape there in the music-room."

Mrs. Carruth looked surprised, then nodded. "It is just as well. It would n't be good for any girl who is studying to be sucked into the vortex of Molly's gay life. Willard," she paused,

regarding him scrutinizingly, and speaking in a changed tone. "how does Margaret look to you?"

"I have n't spoken to her yet to-night. Why? She has n't been ill, has she?"

"No, not ill."

"Why, what do you mean, Mrs. Carruth?" asked the young man, with concern. "Magnet has always been my ideal of perfect physical balance."

"How much of it is self-control—that is the question? You know what she has always wished. A mistaken, mistaken ideal, I am sure of it. It isn't all selfishness in me to refuse. No young girl can appreciate the exigencies, the sacrifices, the life entails; yet my life is so bound up in Margaret's—I torture myself at times with questions—and when I see her less and less inclined to sing, I fear it may mean a deep concealed sentiment which might—Oh, I am foolish about it, I hope. I think her young friends can judge better than I if she is in a natural, happy state. Forget this, Willard."

The swift, agitated speech came to an end, and troubled lines gave the frank face a careworn look that suddenly aged it. French tried to conceal his surprise at the unusual outbreak.

"I assure you, I have not noticed anything, Mrs. Carruth. Magnet is generally considered to be one of the luckiest, happiest girls in town."

"Oh, that is what I want her to be! Tell me if you ever remark anything which looks otherwise. Thank you, Willard." She pressed his hand suddenly and hurried away to greet a guest who had just entered.

Willard met Althea's eyes. Her stony glance turned to one of appeal. He lounged up to the group of which she was one, and after a few words succeeded in disengaging her from the toils.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed," she said, as they moved away. "I've been associating with Moses so long that to get with a man a little younger makes me feel less like a mummy. How soon are we going home?"

"Oh, not for a long time," returned French placidly. "Let us see what is going on in the music-room."

"I don't want to go near Mrs. Darling."

"That won't do. You have begun nobly with her. Don't show the white feather!"

"The idea!" Althea moved along beside him. "If you think I am afraid of her!"

"Very well, then. I want to look after my friend Vandyke."

"My! Isn't he swell!" observed Miss Gaylord.

"I want to be sure he is being taken care of," added French, "but I hear Miss Carruth playing to him."

"You *think* you do," retorted Althea. "Wait

a minute. I want to make a bet. What'll you bet Mr. Vandyke is n't sitting in that little corner seat under the palms with Molly D.?"

"A box of candy. He is n't that kind. Beside, he is music-mad."

"Oh, you poor infant! As if he could help himself! Don't you know her?"

"Well, rather," said French, nettled. "I sat under the palms with her myself before you were born."

"Go to!" retorted Althea.

"But it was because I wanted to. Just remember that."

"I suppose 'Remember that' is Bostonese for 'Don't you forget it.' Well, don't *you* forget that chocolates are my favorite candy. Come now, since seeing is believing."

They advanced to the door of the music-room. Margaret was at the piano, over which was leaning a man, gazing appreciatively at the satisfying lines of her face and figure as the music rolled from under her hands without apparent effort. The lashes veiled her darkening eyes, an occasional stress of feeling pressed closer her full, curved lips. Her attitude of power and repose enchained the watcher; but he was a well-known painter of the city, and not Vandyke.

Miss Gaylord triumphantly followed French's reluctant gaze to the remotest corner, where, palm-shaded, Mrs. Darling wielded her fan, her eyes

upon the young lawyer, who, close beside her, allowed his distraught glance to wander from the ceiling to the piano. One hand was in his pocket. He seemed absorbed.

"There!" exclaimed Althea.

The music ceased. Margaret's lashes lifted, and her gaze, full of suppressed fire, went toward the cosy corner. Vandyke's dreamy glance left the ceiling, dropped straight upon hers, and remained fixed. He rose with a sudden movement.

"There!" ejaculated French. "Whom did I say she was playing to?"

"The candy's mine. Where did I say he was sitting?"

"Oh! you shall have the candy," said French loftily. Then he advanced to the piano. "One more, Magnet, won't you?" he said, adding his plea to that of the others.

"No more," she returned firmly, her smile brilliant from the emotion of her music. She rose. "There are too many people coming in. It would be like the vague irritation of an orchestra at a reception."

"Then sing," pursued French.

The smile vanished. She shook her head.

"You know they would be still then, and want to be," he went on urgently. "I have n't heard you in ages."

The girl looked at him with surprising gravity. "Will you excuse me, Willard?"

"Why, yes, if you're going to use that tone. What is it? Have you a cold?"

"No, but I'm out of the way of it."

"Why, that's all wrong! It's a big mistake you're making. Magnets, a big mistake. Piano-playing is fine, all very well, of course; but there's nothing on earth, and I guess nothing much better in heaven, than the real article in the way of a singing voice, and you have the real thing. It's a crime to hide it under a bushel. Isn't that so, Vandyke?"

"Indeed, yes," responded the latter warmly.

"You give so much more attention lately to the piano," French turned back to the girl, who stood tall and motionless, her glance falling even though her head was held high, as she rested one hand on a chair-back. "I don't understand it."

She smiled faintly. "Must you understand everything, Willard?"

"But this means a lot to us all. You needn't expect it to be taken meekly if you cut off that supply. I shall make mistakes in my figures. Mosby won't paint nearly as well"—

"Just what I told her!" put in the artist.

"Vandyke would contrive to put poetry even into a law practice if he heard you sing."

The lawyer started to add urgency to French's appeal when a slight circumstance restrained him.

Margaret was grasping a fold of her soft gown with one hand, and he noticed that the filmy stuff



in her sleeve was trembling as if a breeze blew it. He glanced quickly up to her face. Her lip was caught in her teeth. The expression was not one of light obstinacy.

"Miss Carruth, if you really would rather not sing now," he said, "may I interrupt Mr. French's arguments and ask you to tell me about this idol in the corner?"

French at once strode to the side of Mrs. Darling, who was looking bored, and became oratorical. "This, my friends, the idol of which Mr. Vandyke speaks, is a most remarkable curio. She is practically indestructible, enduring more receptions, calls, and balls to the twenty-four hours than any other known goddess. Her worshipers are innumerable, and not one of them would think he could lead a cotillion without her assistance. The women adore her less openly, but not one dares to get a bonnet until she sees what the idol is going to" —

"Sit down here and behave yourself!" interrupted Mrs. Darling, lazily smiling, while Althea, with a resentful air, dove behind the screen of palms and listened attentively to Margaret's history of the ingeniously ugly god who reposed in their bower.

But she could not help listening to scraps of the talk between Mrs. Darling and French, so presently she moved away to the piano, where in looking over music she found an object of real interest.

Presently Mrs. Darling took her companion into the next room. They had no sooner gone than Margaret paused, regarding Vandyke, who was pulling his mustache abstractedly.

"Why did you take the trouble to do this?" she asked abruptly.

He looked at her questioningly.

"Why did you stop Mr. French?"

Vandyke smiled. "To ask you about the idol, you know."

"For which you cared nothing."

The man flushed. "What makes you think so? Have I been rude?"

"No: only absent-minded and honest."

"I am still under the spell of your music. Forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive: I have to thank you: but it was odd that you, an utter stranger, should have—have seen—it makes you not a stranger." Margaret finished with a brief smile.

"That is great good fortune for me," returned Vandyke with sincerity. "Perhaps I should ask your pardon for seeing that you were disturbed."

"No." Margaret looked away for a thoughtful moment, then back at him. His strong, reposeful presence seemed to appeal to her. "I never saw you until ten minutes ago," she said suddenly. "I don't know why it should seem easy to speak to you of something about which I have been silent for many long months to every one."

"Is it because I can help you in some way?" He looked as he said it like a man who, despite his quiet manner, was accustomed to finding a way out of each problem of life.

The girl shook her head. "No, excepting by letting me speak. I'm afraid I grow morbid. I have no friends who are not still more my mother's friends, and I try not to risk making my mother unhappy."

"Let me hear what troubles you."

"Ambition, most people would call it; but in my soul I know it is not merely that."

Vandyke nodded. "Ah! I understand, then. All that Mr. French said, and more, is true about your voice."

Margaret's eyes were moist as she looked up into his.

"You wish to go upon the stage, and your mother objects — naturally."

"Naturally?" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes, indeed. She has everything in the world now, but lacking you, nothing."

"Wait!" Margaret spoke with agitation. For an inexplicable reason she wished to be justified in this man's eyes, and his quick perception of the truth and of her mother's standpoint led her to express herself with the more freedom. "We were both happy at first in discovering that my voice was unusual. I worked faithfully here, and then mother took me to London, where I studied.

When my teacher heard me he took it for granted that I was destined for the concert stage, but at first he did not speak of it. My hopes grew with my powers, but I always kept them to myself until a day when mother and I were both in my teacher's room. I sang a song especially well, and he, with unusual approval and enthusiasm, began to speak of my debut in London. My mother opened her eyes, and at once treated the matter as a joke. The teacher persisted; but when he found that my mother and I had actually not discussed the matter of a professional future for me, he was amazed. He told mother that I had more than my share of talents, for such a gift of holding one's tongue had never come under his observation. He saw that I felt very unhappy, and he tried to comfort me. "Never fear, Miss Carruth. Your mother will change her mind," he said. "There will be no need for you to change yours." But mother was badly startled to find me so much in earnest, and she took passage at once for America. We had one painful scene, but it was the last. I have said nothing since on the subject." Margaret paused an instant for self-control, then went on. "I can scarcely tell why I yearn to do this thing. It is a power in me, pressing for outlet. It is as if I had a message to give the multitude, and must live in unrest until I have delivered it. I have grown afraid of my voice; to sing rouses in me such unutterable

things, such longings. I am shaken from my balance. I cannot do it."

There was repressed passion in her speech, and she turned her head away.

Vandyke looked at the waves of her hair as the electric lights fell through the palms upon her. Her breast heaved as if she felt herself in chains, and her hand was clenched again upon her soft gown.

"How long is it since you came back?" he asked.

"Four months."

"And your mother does not refer to a possibility of any change in your manner of life?"

"Never."

"And your life is very full, of course?"

"Yes, full" — Margaret turned back to him — "of emptiness."

"That should n't be," he said simply.

The girl looked at him expectantly. That which she felt from him was not so much sympathy in her mood as protection from it.

"I have heard a great deal about the Carruths since I came to Boston, and all good," he said. "People who have no part in ostentation, but keep a home which is a roof-tree to so many beside themselves, and whose powers are used to carry forward such worthy interests; how can the life of such people be empty?"

Her glance fell away from his.

"Mrs. Carruth must be a remarkable woman," he continued.

"She is, indeed: tireless, wonderfully efficient, carrying on any number of varying interests, neglecting nothing, and I" - Margaret met again the eyes that spoke to her more eloquently than speech. "I try to be her faithful lieutenant. That is what she wants me to be," she added slowly. "She likes me to sing at the college settlements, the asylums, the Homes. She says God gave me my voice for that."

"And perhaps He did," suggested Vandyke. "What success do you have in such places?"

Margaret gave him a strange smile. "They love me for it - poor creatures!"

"Then of course you haven't given up singing there?"

She looked at him, half-appealing, half-defiant. "It shakes me so. It is the very success, the conscious power of producing the effect, that unchains the longing. Oh, Mr. Vandyke," with a despairing change of tone, "I'm afraid I can't make any one understand, and it is all very futile, very egotistical. It is better for me to lock it away out of sight, where all well-bred skeletons are kept."

"Yes, I think I do understand," came the quiet answer. "Your own balance and self-control are very dear to you. It is painful to you to acknowledge to yourself that you are unnerved. The dramatic in your nature is too strong for you."

Margaret gave him a grateful look, and he returned it kindly.

"But that is no reason for you to give up that charitable work," he added.

"Why should they claim so much?" she asked quickly. "I can do other things for them."

"So can other people," he answered.

She flashed to the roots of her hair. "Then you think I ought to go on yielding, ought to dismiss all thoughts of rebellion, — ought to let my mother's will rule me in this."

The smile that grew in his eyes and lips as he met her gaze made her heart beat strangely. "I have n't heard you sing," he answered. "At present I say 'Yes.' But even Samson's strength deserted him once upon a time."

"How strange it is that I should have told you all this!" she said.

"It does n't seem so to me," he replied.

Some one flitted toward the palms. Mrs. Darling's blonde head peeped around the green. "When you are quite, *quite* through the lecture, Margaret," she said playfully, "your mother wants you."

Late that evening, when all the guests had departed, Mrs. Carruth and her daughter stood a minute before the open fire.

"What do you think of Miss Gaylord, Margaret?" asked the former.

"I think she is very much in earnest about her music," returned the girl absently.

"She evidently amuses Willard. I'm glad. Willard is a nice fellow, but no more submissive under boredom than other men. Did you talk with that romantic-looking Sir Launcelet, — that Philadelphia lawyer?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if there are n't some Philadelphia girls feeling bereft just now? However, Willard says he has n't been a society man. Those eyes! When he thanked me for his evening's pleasure I felt as if I were being made love to. Well," Mrs. Carruth yawned, "it has been a long day. Let us go to bed."

Margaret went into the music room and turned off the lights. A street-lamp sent a beam athwart the palms. The girl glided into their shadow, where sat the smug-faced idol upon its pedestal. With her hands clasped about its neck, she leaned her forehead against the cold bronze, and the thing smiled complacently, seeming to be striving to look down on her soft brown tresses with its cross-eyed gaze.



## CHAPTER V

### SOCIETY

MISS GAYLORD heard voices in the next room after she had retired that night. She tried to recognize the accents of the strange one, but in vain.

"I don't believe it's that Mr. Vandyke," she thought. "Mrs. Darling wouldn't let him get away like that."

But it was Vandyke, who, obeying a quiet invitation from Willard French, had resisted Mrs. Darling's effort to induce him to come in and have a midnight chat with her, and gone to French's room instead.

"Sorry you don't smoke," said Willard hospitably. "Makes a fellow feel as if he could n't do anything to make you comfortable."

"I'll smoke, then," replied Vandyke. He took a cigar, lit it, and dropped into an easy-chair, while French took his favorite attitude on the divan. "I never cared for it. The smoke got in my way; but now I have n't anything else to do."

"Humph!" Willard regarded him critically. "You have n't the physique of a book-worm."

"Oh, a man looks out for his muscle." Both

smoked for a silent space, then Vandyke continued: "I'm glad you asked me up here. Now that I have met the Carruths, I want to know all I may about them."

"Interest you, do they?"

"Surely I should be unimpressible if they did n't."

"By 'they' I presume you mean Miss Carruth," remarked French, with a grin. "Your interest in the great god Bud to-night reminded me of that of Kipling's maiden in 'Mandalay.' You remember?"

"This idol was n't 'Bud,'" rejoined Vandyke tranquilly; "and by 'they' I mean 'they.' Mrs. Carruth is a remarkable woman."

"Well," said French approvingly, "evidently those eyes of yours are good to see with. By Jove, that woman's got nerve!" he went on after some thoughtful puffs.

His guest watched him and waited with interest.

"Walking on a volcano all the time, and knows it, and yet—but what's the use of telling you? It's just one person telling another that's going to spring the mine one of these days. Anybody who is a real friend of Mrs. Carruth's had better hold his tongue."

"Well, you would rouse every particle of curiosity in me if I were n't already informed."

French took his pipe from his lips and stared. "Informed?" he echoed, rising on his elbow.

"Oh!" sinking back and speaking disgustedly. "Molly Darling told you. She might have waited, I think; though I don't know why I should blame her, when I did such a silly, schoolgirlish trick myself as to refer to it at all. Of course you have merely seen Miss Carruth, and you can't realize how her pride is going to be wounded in the most sensitive place if the truth ever does get to her; but Mrs. Carruth knows, and" —

"Stop!" commanded Vandyke, and French stared again. "We've been mistaken. I don't understand your references. Mrs. Darling has told me nothing. What I know, Miss Carruth told me herself."

"A thousand apologies to the fair Molly," said Willard, with relief; "and what, pray, did Miss Carruth tell you?"

"What she did not expect me to speak of, probably. Come, French, let us talk about the weather. We're making a mess of the other subject, I think."

"Oh, speak out! You can't make me believe Miss Carruth said anything to you in the first half-hour of your acquaintance that she would n't say to me, the companion of her mud-pie days."

"I don't want you to believe it."

"Then set my mind at rest."

Vandyke smiled, but kept silence.

"You evidently want to make me jealous," remarked French. "Miss Carruth has always been

like a sister to me, and I've never for a moment had the temerity to believe that she would consent to be anything else: but this is a little too much! Let's see." He interviewed the ceiling through a blue haze. "I said Mrs. Carruth was walking on a volcano, and you agreed to it from something Magnet told you. Oh, — it had completely gone out of my mind, — she must have said something to you about the stage. Eh?"

Vandyke dropped the ash from his cigar into the receiver.

"Don't be shy, my legal friend. Her mother referred to it to me to-night. Said she was afraid Magnet was growing morbid, or something to that effect."

"Mrs. Carruth's chin looks as if she held decided views," remarked Vandyke. "Her daughter's is the same shape, though."

"Yes." French smiled at some thought of his own. "Miss Carruth inherits a surprising number of her mother's traits — considering."

"Did you know her father?"

"Mr. Carruth has been dead about ten years. I knew him, — yes, indeed. A powerful man in the business world; but I've thought a good many times," continued French between the pulls at his pipe, "that Mrs. Carruth didn't understand her daughter quite as well as she ought to. Magnet chafes at her own life, though she's plucky and her mother has nothing to complain of. She

hasn't as many friends of her own age as you would expect, though she is in society too. There's no use in harnessing a blooded horse to a coal wagon. Mrs. Carruth, by crooking her finger, could get lots of women who would like the tasks she sets her daughter, and would do them just as well."

"Probably Miss Carruth grows by the discipline."

"Well, there you're too deep for me. I know she keeps a stiff upper lip, and is considered one of the luckiest girls in Boston." French gave a musing exclamation. "I hope she'll be good to Miss Gaylord!" he ejaculated.

"The young lady she was playing to when I went in?"

"Probably; and who is now asleep on the other side of the wall near your elbow."

Vandyke looked at the wall somewhat startled.

"Oh, it's thick," remarked French.

"She is a relative of yours?"

"Possibly, by some legal quirk. Some are born to relatives, some achieve relatives, and some have relatives thrust upon them. This is one of the latter variety. She is a sort of step-neighbor-in-law of mine."

"And a very near one, too," said Vandyke.

"She can't hear us, though. That's all right. I'd like to see the girl enjoy herself," remarked French. "She is a stranger here."

"Indeed? I sympathize with her: but then, she knows Mrs. Darling."

French turned lazily on his couch and smiled at his friend. "You find that a panacea, eh?"

"Mrs. Darling is very kind," said Vandyke gravely.

"Heigho!" Willard suppressed a yawn. "All in the standpoint," he remarked.

"I should think her the very person to make a girl enjoy herself. She knows so many people."

"You're right. If a girl takes her fancy, she knows how to put her through."

"Can't you induce her to take Miss Gaylord up? She seems such a quiet, retiring girl; she needs just such reassurance as Mrs. Darling would give her."

French's teeth gleamed on his pipe-stem at this. "You and I together might accomplish it. You seem to be getting in//fluence in that quarter."

"I? Oh, not at all," returned Vandyke, with such quiet sincerity that his host's smile widened.

"If you really feel philanthropic, just take a little notice of Miss Gaylord yourself," suggested French.

"The philanthropy would have to be on her side, I assure you. I'm always tongue-tied with women who don't help me out."

French laughed. "She'll help you out all right."

"I should be very glad to meet her again," said

Vandyke courteously. "How soon," he added, with an earnest hesitation which entertained his host vastly, "how soon would it be permissible for me to go again to the Carruths'?"

"Just follow your inclination, my dear fellow. You'll never run against any formality there."

"That is very agreeable advice." The speaker sat up in his chair with a look of pleasure.

"The difficulty is, they're not often at home except on their evening," went on French.

"Of course." The visitor's face fell. "I hadn't thought of that; but," hopefully, "there is always that evening."

"Oh, yes, there is always that evening," echoed French. "Well," he said to himself after his guest had departed, "there is one square peg that has found a square hole, sure! The magnet works again! Gad! he's a queer chap! I can't find out whether he was born yesterday, or only has chivalry to burn—as my ward would express it."

Vandyke in his inexperience had not counted on the likelihood of meeting the Carruths accidentally at some of the many functions to which he began to be invited. He knew nothing of the circles, the cliques, the strata, and variety of society in Boston; so the pleasant surprise was the greater when, on an evening soon afterward, in the crowded drawing-room of one of his new friends, he saw Miss Carruth. She had recog-

nized him first, and regarded him fixedly as, after a few greetings and remarks, he stood for a minute impassive of countenance, waiting.

Expression suddenly flashed over his face, and he strode toward her.

"I willed you to look at me," she said, with a frank, childlike smile that had mischief in it, and showed a new phase of her.

"Then no wonder I did," he responded. She was dressed in white, her shoulders bare, and her well-carried head was crowned by a slender diadem full of tiny sparks of light. He saw that her presence was superb, though still girlish, and his mind was full of her fitness to carry out those desires which just now seemed far from her happy thoughts.

"I did not dream of finding you here," he went on, "else I should have come with far more pleasure." A greater radiance grew in her face. "I give you my word, I'm sleepy all the time, Miss Carruth. I have always heard that Boston people were cold and conservative. Why, I never met such cordiality in my life! When I came to this city, it was with the intention of staying, and I had a reason for desiring to secure some social standing, but" — he paused with a comical look of deprecation.

"You did n't bargain for standing room only," laughed Margaret. The dull evening had become so interesting. "Come, I'm tired too. I know



this house." They passed together out into the hall and down its length, to where, by a deep window, a seat was built into the wall.

There they sat, followed by the envious glances of some who wished they had been first to discover this restful nook.

"I begin to see that I must either give up my work or not accept everything," added Vandyke, basking in his good fortune, as he looked at Margaret leaning back in her corner, with the tiny sparks, like fireflies, in her hair.

"Yes, you can pick and choose, for society is n't an important part of a man's work. It is of ours. Sometimes we get rewards," she added.

"Sometimes we do indeed," he returned significantly, not appropriating her suggestion, but giving his own openly. "I have been wanting to see you again. Those one meets who furnish food for thought are so few. My first consideration when I make a new acquaintance is to wonder what this person is going to do for me: what will he or she do for me in my mental gymnasium?" His eyes, as he spoke, looked so frankly expectant that Margaret smiled, though an undefined sensation of disappointment ran through her too.

"You are not thinking that I can do anything toward developing your mental musele, I hope?"

"Did that confession sound cold-blooded?" he asked. "It is true, though."

"That is redundancy, Mr. Vandyke. The vice of insincerity will surely never be laid at your door."

"Yes: that is why I probably shall never be an ornament to society."

The girl raised her eyebrows. "If you are cynical, then I shall never again believe that I can read character."

"Cynical? I hope not: but I have n't any small talk. I am stupid unless the conversation interests me."

"Perhaps that is what you expect to get from me in your mental gymnasium."

"Interesting conversation? Certainly I do."

"No: education in small talk."

When Vandyke smiled, as he did now in response to Margaret, there came a caressing look in his eyes which, never having seen it in his own face, it would have astonished him profoundly to suspect. "Is that the way I look at women?" he would probably question, and forthwith proceed to cultivate a more impersonal regard: but as nothing interested him less than his own countenance, he was not likely to discover its expressions or to repent and reform in this particular.

"I shall be glad to learn anything you will teach me," he said. "Have you any small talk?"

"Thank you," she replied encouragingly. "That was good. You are doing well."

He picked up her fan and looked at it. He did

not know whether to remind her how far removed from superficiality their previous interview had been. Her mood now was so altered.

“What have you been doing?” he asked.

“Since when?”

He looked up again. “Since I knew you.”

“Let me see. That is three days. I have been singing.”

“What!”

“Yes. I sang at a Mission on Sunday afternoon.”

He looked at her full of interest. “How did that happen?”

“I thought over what you said to me, and mother asked me to. See what you are doing in my mental gymnasium!”

“Why didn’t you reward me by letting me know? I might have heard you too.”

“I didn’t know where to reach you — and I shouldn’t have considered doing so in any case. I was too busy controlling my runaways.”

“Perhaps had you known my address you might have thought of me?”

“Oh, I thought of you.”

“Let me provide against a possible future.” Vandyke took his visiting card from a pocket and wrote on it the address of a club. “I suppose your mother was much pleased.”

“Yes. I didn’t tell her who had awakened my conscience.”

"And was the effect of your work on your audience the same as before?"

She nodded.

"And still painful on yourself? Tell me if I am probing where I should not."

"I had more self-control this time."

"Supposing you should grow out of the morbid condition altogether?"

A lambent glow came in the girl's gray eyes, and the sparks flashed in her hair as she stirred. "Is it morbid for a bird to crave to use its wings as well as to sing?" she asked quietly.

"Poor bird! Brave bird!" said Vandyke. "If it were not presumptuous in me to praise you, I should tell you how I admire you for the victory."

Margaret's breast rose and fell, and she leaned back on the cushions behind her.

"Where can you put this card?" he went on after a minute.

"Nowhere." She smiled at him. "Woman's rights in the matter of pockets have n't penetrated to evening gowns."

"There!" he said plaintively, turning the card undecidedly in his fingers. "You see how I blunder. Tell me what I should have done?"

"You should have said: 'Miss Carruth, let me send you my address to-morrow.'"

"Miss Carruth, let me send you my address to-morrow," he repeated, then added blankly, "but I've forgotten yours."

She laughed. "You are a hopeless case, — an absolutely hopeless case."

"But you can tell me the number."

"Of course I can ; but how much more complimentary it would have been for you to telephone Willard French for it to-morrow !"

"Oh !" said Vandyke, pondering on the lesson so seriously that Margaret laughed anew, while another man's voice spoke near them.

"Who invokes Willard French ?" That personage approached and stood before them, wondering at what he discovered. "To find Magnet Carruth twosing with *any* man ! What next ?" was his mental comment.

"I was so afraid I might hear too good things of myself, I spoke at once," he remarked.

"Modest violet, I'm glad you did," said Margaret. "You know, when I get to talking about you, Willard, my feelings are apt to carry me away. There's a model for you," she added, turning to Vandyke.

"Oh, Magnet, come !" protested French, shyly shading his face with his hand.

"Poor boy ! No, I did n't mean that you were the model. Mr. Vandyke understands."

"Perhaps he does ; but your mother thinks you are lost."

"Does she ? When you go back, tell her I'm not, won't you ?"

French raised himself on his toes. "How do

you know I'm going back? I think I'd rather stay and be lost with you."

"I made a mistake, Mr. Vandyke, in saying that Mr. French is not the model for what you want. He is the very person."

"Oh, come! If you're going to talk riddles!"

"But I tell you that Mr. Vandyke understands."

"So no matter about me, I suppose," said Willard, injured.

"No matter about you. How is Miss Gaylord?"

"Asleep, I presume. She seems to have a good conscience."

"How is her music getting on?"

"Well enough, I fancy. I gather from her remarks that harmony is introducing more discord into her life than anything else just now."

"Oh, harmony is enough to turn anybody's hair gray. I went into it a little way and then retreated as gracefully as possible. Does mother want me for anything in particular?"

"I think she wishes you to meet an old party whose business it is to see stars."

"To complete his education?" suggested Vandyke.

Margaret turned to him demurely. "Bravo!" she murmured.

"He's an English astronomer, and something of a lion, I judge. I left him roaring gently to

Mrs. Darling. She 'll have him purring before she gets done with him."

"I should like to meet him," said Vandyke, with interest.

Margaret rose instantly. "Let us go," she said. French lounged ahead of them.

"I will take that card," she added to her escort.

Vandyke hesitated. "But you have no place to put it."

"I will find a place."

Vandyke took the card from his pocket, and she placed it between the leaves of her closed fan. He viewed its insecure position. "It will slip out, there," he said.

She smiled and tapped her gloved palm with the ivory sticks. "Did you ever own a fan?" she asked.

Later in the evening they met again. He glanced her over. "You did drop that address," he said.

"What a memory you have for trifles!" she responded, biting her lip.

"I beg your pardon. It isn't a trifle to me. Very well," he smiled, "to-morrow I shall telephone to French and write you a note."

"If you remember," she answered.

But that night, while she made ready for bed, Burton Vandyke's bit of pasteboard lay safely on her dressing-table.

## CHAPTER VI

### A NEW LEAF

"WE must n't forget Miss Gaylord," Mrs. Carruth said to her daughter as they sat at breakfast the next morning. "She may be getting lonely."

"Would n't she come to us if she were?"

"I don't know. She might not. Could n't you run in there sometime to-day and take a look at her?"

So Margaret, returning from a lunch that afternoon, directed her driver to stop at Mrs. Barlow's in Newbury Street. The maid who answered her ring seemed doubtful what to do with her. Evidently a caller for Miss Gaylord was a novelty.

Finally, deciding against the exertion of running up the long flights of stairs, she told the visitor where Althea's room was, and left her to her own devices.

Miss Carruth found her friend's door ajar, and in the moment while she hesitated to be certain that she was right, she caught a glimpse of Althea, sitting in a rather dejected attitude, her hands crossed listlessly in her lap, and her face averted,



looking out a window which gave upon the brick wall of the next house.

"In good time," thought Margaret; and she knocked.

"Come," said Althea indifferently; but when, instead of the maid with towels, appeared the vision of Miss Carruth in visiting costume, the girl sprang up with flushing cheeks.

"How good of you!" she said.

"I did n't know that you would be pleased by this informal performance, but I did as I was told," said Margaret, giving Althea's hand a cordial pressure. Miss Gaylord doubted for a swift instant if her guest would kiss her, and even made a slight movement of her own head, which Miss Carruth perceived. "I don't like to kiss veils, and I won't make you do it," went on the guest brightly. "What a nice little music-room you have! I suspect there is a lot of work done here."

"Yes, indeed," said Althea. "If one could only work all the time! Sit down, won't you?"

"Oh, you are insatiable!" Miss Carruth accepted the offered chair.

"But the idle hours are so prosy."

"Lucky girl to have any!" said Margaret.

"Why, I don't see what you can have to do except amuse yourself."

"I never amuse myself," said Margaret, continuing to look about her.

"What in the world can you mean?"

"Well, you come and be Miss Carruth a month, and see. Of course you would have the pleasure of living with my precious mother: but that is all I should begrudge you if you would give me this little den in exchange."

"Well, I'll be" — began Althea, in slow amazement, then suddenly stopped herself with a cough. "Why, if you really feel that way, I'm not going to be a bit afraid of you any more. Won't you take off your things?"

"I have n't time to-day. But why should you be afraid of me?"

"Because — well, you'll find out probably after I've shocked you a few times. Won't you have some candy?" Althea reached for a large box of chocolates on a neighboring table. "They're delicious, and you ought to have some, for you were the cause of my getting them."

"How mysterious you are!" Miss Carruth took one of the confections, and Althea filled her own little mouth and talked on under difficulties.

"I won it on a bet. Do you think that's awful?" She regarded her visitor with serious questioning.

"That depends," said Margaret.

"Well, you see, it was this way. The other night, at your house, Mr. French and I were out in the hall and we heard you playing. He said you were playing to that Vandyke man with the

eyes ; but I knew better. I knew Mrs. Darling was in there and that you would n't get a chance."

Miss Carruth flushed suddenly, and an imperceptible stiffness ran through her.

"Do take some more," said Althea, giving a little hospitable shake to the box. "Candy never hurts me ; does it you ?"

"Sometimes. No more now, thank you."

Miss Gaylord sank back in her chair, putting another chocolate in her mouth. "Mr. French had the nerve to say that he had really won the bet, even after I showed him the great Van sitting just where I said he would be."

Margaret gave the faintest smile out at the brick wall, then back at her hostess. "What a funny child you are !" she said.

"Oh, I don't know," responded Althea, lifting her chin with a little rowdyish air. "I don't believe I'm so much more of a child than you are. But I knew I'd shock you. I suppose I have, have n't I?" she added curiously.

"I — I don't think I quite understand you."

"I suppose not," said Althea resignedly. "I did n't suppose anybody in Boston would. That's the reason I made up my mind to be a recluse."

"And now you don't find it pleasant to be a recluse?"

"Oh, once in a while it's a bore ; but it's better than walking on the ragged edge of slang all the time with people like you."

"Slang?" repeated Miss Carruth, surprised.

"Yes, I'd be glad to give it up, but Gee whiz! what a hold it gets on anybody! At your house the other night I did n't dare to say a thing but 'yes' and 'no.' People who can use it or not use it, like Mrs. Darling, are my despair. I'm not that way. It's got to be total abstinence with me or the whole thing. I wish there was a 'Dwight' for the cure of slang. I don't know but I'd rather be honest, though, than to be like Mrs. Darling — all things to all men, and the more men the merrier."

Margaret winced, and spoke hastily: "Mrs. Darling is my cousin, — at least, her husband is."

"Oh, that's so! What a jay I was to forget it!" exclaimed Althea contritely. "Mr. Darling is one of the finest men I ever saw. You must think the world of him."

"We do. I am surprised that you seem so familiar with them."

"Oh, I knew them all right out in Colorado; that is, I did n't see much of him, but you don't need to eat a whole jar of butter to find out it's good. I was just fascinated with her too, but not so much that I could n't see that he was miles too good for her; and since she snubbed me the other day on the street, I'm not so much bewitched as I was. I'd lots rather be like you," added Althea naively. "I'm going to make a stab at it, too. I was thinking about you when you came in

to-day. See that box tacked up on the wall? That 's a slang box. I began putting in a nickel for the poor children's fresh-air fund every time I slipped, but my! I soon saw that there would n't be an unaired slum baby in Boston, and that they 'd have to reach over into New York to supply the demand; so I'm going to come down in my tax. The boys at home have an anti-swearing club. My little brother belongs, and he showed me the list of fines. 'Darns' were four for a cent. I'm going to take example and moderate my extravagance, so there 'll be some hope of going on with my music."

"That 's right; I would n't talk slang. I want to hear you play when you feel like it."

"Why should you? You are n't paid to suffer, like my poor teacher. Some day I'm going to hear you again. It does me lots of good."

"Right now, if you like," said Margaret, beginning to take off her gloves.

Althea's face brightened, and just then a tap came at the half-open door. "Come," said the girl, and in walked Mrs. Darling.

"Oh! it's you, Margaret!" cried the newcomer. "I wondered who Miss Gaylord had. Well, how do you do? Are n't you cosy, up here!"

Althea rose and returned the visitor's greeting mechanically. "How strange," she said stiffly, "that it never rains but it pours cats and dogs."

Mrs. Darling laughed. "I'm interested to know which of us is the cat, aren't you, Margaret?"

"Miss Carruth's second visit and your first," pursued Miss Gaylord, "at one and the same time."

"Yes." Mrs. Darling seated herself comfortably. "I only found out last evening where you were. How strange that you should be in the same house with Willard French!" While she spoke, her eyes were roving about, taking notes of the furnishings of the room. "Ah! those are good photographs of your father and mother. Are they well? Is n't she cosy here, Margaret?"

"Yes: I was just telling her I half-envied her. There is something bohemian in my blood that stirs at the thought of student life. I don't know which side I get it from, I'm sure. Do you?"

"Oh, I think your mother would make a very good bohemian if she were put to it. You ought to have a fire in that little grate, my dear, and where is your tea-table?"

"I had n't thought yet about a tea-table," said Althea with dignity.

"Well, you should have," retorted Mrs. Darling vivaciously. "I was saying to myself, as I climbed those wretched long stairs, what a refreshing cup of tea I was going to have. I'll tell you what," she added with inspiration, "go and get the tea-things out of Willard's room."

Miss Gaylord held herself with what she hoped was a good imitation of the repose of the Vere de Veres.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mrs. Darling, but I never go into Mr. French's room."

"What, never? The very next room, and he away all day! Oh, my dear! We've met before! It's hardly ever, isn't it? Let this be one of the exceptions. The idea of that little minx putting on airs with me!" she thought with amusement.

"There are no exceptions, Mrs. Darling."

"And that room has remained a Blue Beard chamber to you ever since you have been in this house?" incredulously.

"Not at all," returned Althea coolly. "Why should I be curious about Mr. French's room? Here is some of his candy," she added, passing the box. "Let chocolate apologize for tea this once, and I'll try to have some the next time you come."

"Prunes and prisms, Allie!" laughed Mrs. Darling, as she took a chocolate. "Are n't you proper!" And upon this Margaret was disconcerted to receive from that one of Althea's eyes concealed from her other guest, an elaborate wink.

"Oh, I just gave her a lesson in deportment, and don't you forget it," said Miss Gaylord impressively, telling French all about the visit that evening after dinner. They usually had a

talk in the parlor before separating, he for his evening's engagement and she to her novel or letter-writing. "I guess she thought you were gone on me when she saw the size of my candy box," continued the girl, with an appreciative shake of the head. "I didn't let *her* know it was a bet, though I'd told Miss Carruth all about it before Mrs. Darling came in."

"About what?"

"About our bet."

"You did!"

"Yes, of course. Why not?" asked Althea coolly.

"Why? Vandyke was a stranger to Miss Carruth—she must have thought it strange—people don't say such things to her." French was incoherent in his hopelessness of making his companion understand.

"Oh, come off the roof!" in a disgusted drawl. "People are always trying to make out that Miss Carruth is a little tin god on wheels. She's nothing of the kind."

French looked doubtfully at the boyish-talking, girlish-looking speaker. Althea was always dressed with quiet and perfect taste, the slenderest of little jewelled rings were on her dainty hands. He never adjusted himself to her paradoxes. "Seems to me that is a new ruby you have," he remarked, catching the glow of a small stone on her finger. "Where did you get that?"



"The gift of the groom," returned Althea nonchalantly.

"You have a lot of pretty things," said French. "Why don't you talk pearls and diamonds, too?"

"What are you giving us?" she inquired.

"Don't you remember the fairy story, where one princess talked pearls and diamonds, and the other frogs and snakes?"

"Slang, do you mean?" Althea smiled interestedly.

French smiled back in silence.

"Say, are you preaching to me?" The idea seemed to entertain her genuinely.

"Why should n't I?"

"Because, Reverend Willard, there isn't any necessity. You're on the freight train, man! Get off and take the express!"

"What are you at now?"

"I'm going to give it all up — the whole shooting-match," said Miss Gaylord, with an expansive gesture.

"What? Slang?"

"That's right," Althea nodded impressively. "I'm going to be like Miss Carruth."

The spontaneity of the laugh which French emitted brought the blood stinging to the girl's cheeks.

"Why not, I should like to know?" she asked, and seeing the hurt light in her eyes, he endeavored to check his mirth.

"I was only wondering," he said rather brokenly, "when you were going to begin."

"I have begun. There's a box tacked up on my wall now for fines for the poor children's fresh-air fund."

"How much are you going to put in when you go upstairs?"

"Why, I haven't been very bad to-night!" said Althea naïvely.

"You don't notice it when you're with me as much as you would with Magnet -- Miss Caruth."

"Magnet's a corking good name for her," remarked Miss Gaylord warmly. "She just draws me like -- like" --

"Your good angel? She will be your good angel, too, if you'll let her," said French encouragingly. "But what did she say when you told her of our bet?"

"Said I was a funny child."

"Is that all?"

"Of course. You're all off your trolley about her. She's all right. She thinks the folks are as good as the people." Althea finished with a wink and nod that clinched the matter.

French regarded her thoughtfully. Evidently Margaret had been successfully adaptable, and who knew what might be the permanent result to this girl of the fact that Mrs. Darling had snubbed her on their first accidental meeting?

"I was having so much joy with her when Mrs. Darling came in. She was just going to play. Of course, it was kind of Mrs. Darling to come, though I guess it was only to see what I was doing so close to you. How did she know you had tea-things?"

"I gave her and some other women tea in my room one day."

"It's a wonder she didn't make a break in there herself this afternoon, and swipe 'em."

French looked up, gently inquiring, "And how much fresh air does 'swipe' buy a poor baby?"

"What? Oh, yes! I don't know."

"I think 'swipe' ought to come high," he suggested.

Althea smiled. "You consider it particularly froggy? Just think! I didn't even know I said it."

"You poor girl!"

The exclamation was so serious that a slow, surprised look of resentment came in her eyes.

"You say that as if you pitied me."

"I do. I know something about habits. I had the cigarette mania once, and was nearly broken up before I caught myself."

"I know that's perfectly awful," agreed Althea, "but slang is different. It doesn't injure you."

"Oh yes, it does — a girl," he answered.

She regarded him askance, and he looked at her directly. "Damages her," he went on, slowly and

deliberately, "knocks off the bloom. She becomes a good fellow at best. You understand."

Althea half-rose from her chair, but pride forced her back. He continued in the same quiet, commonplace tone:--

"Much better to become like Miss Carruth, as you suggest."

"I don't see how I'm going to when I don't know what I say half the time." Miss Gaylord was defiant, but suddenly very near tears. Petted, beloved at home, flattered by the youths of her acquaintance, to find herself an object of genuine criticism in the eyes of a young man who was thoroughly at home in a set where she felt herself an alien, was a shock.

"I'll help you," said French. "What do you say to our swearing off together? You remind me, and I'll remind you, and we'll have for our watchword 'Magnet.'"

"I think I'd rather you didn't swear off," said Althea plaintively. "I'd like something to remind me of home."

"No danger," returned French, quite aware that he had hurt her, and half-regretting it, now the operation was over. "You've started to tell me once or twice about the tea-fight between you and Mrs. Darling, and I've always interrupted you."

"It was nothing," returned Miss Gaylord spiritlessly. "She wanted me to go into your room and bring the tea-things, and I wouldn't."

“Why not?”

The girl raised her eyebrows. “Because I’m not a burglar.”

“Is that what you told her?”

“No; I told her I had never been in your room.”

“What!”

“Are you astonished?”

French was exceedingly astonished, more so than it would have been polite to confess.

“She would n’t believe me at first. I did n’t tell her that you declined to enter my parlor as obstinately as if I were the original spider herself. I simply refused her request in language that would n’t give the smallest baby a whiff of oxygen.” Althea spoke with an assumption of indifference, and she suddenly rose. A light flashed in her eyes. “I can do it occasionally, if I am — damaged.” Her voice broke, and she slipped from the room.

Quick as thought French sprang after her. The hall was deserted, and the economical gas-jet burned low. He succeeded in reaching the foot of the stairs as she did, and placed himself in her path.

“You must n’t go like this,” he said.

“Let me by at once!” exclaimed the girl thickly.

“You *know* I only meant to help you,” he answered; and, against her will, Althea liked his voice and his attitude, and knew he spoke truth.

"Don't be angry. If I were n't your friend, what should I care what you said or did?" He tried to take her hand.

"Don't touch me!" said the girl breathlessly, starting back. "You will find I am not a good enough fellow for that."

"I wish I had n't hurt your feelings," he returned beseechingly.

They were both speaking in undertones, and he was afraid each second that some one would come into the hall and find them. "It's absurd enough for me to preach. I know it," He swerved toward the banister, and, like a bird that sees the loop-hole of escape, Althea flew past him, and he did not attempt to follow. He stared at the door-handle meditatively.

"Now I suppose she'll cry," he thought.

But Miss Gaylord did not cry at once. She locked her door, turned up her light, vigorously pulled the slang-box off its hook and flung it into the grate, a few coins jingling in the overthrow, threw open a window and sent her candy-box flying in such wise that the Boston cats talked the rest of the night about the wild hailstorm which had scattered them and fluffed their tails. Then she cast a glance at the mendacious cherry chiffonier which was her bed, longed for her own white, luxurions, brass-bound couch at home, dropped into a rocking-chair, and took her burning cheeks between her hands.

"I hate Boston, and everybody in it!" she thought.

Then she rocked.

"But I won't go home."

She rocked more.

"And acknowledge myself beaten."

The last word started in her head an old rhyme,

"A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree,

The more you beat them, the better they be."

She rocked to the rhythm of this for a while, although its sense, or nonsense, did not in the least suit her mood.

She could hear French in the next room as he moved about, getting ready to go out.

"And where he is going all the girls have the bloom on," she thought. "How about Mrs. Darling, that he likes so much, and flatters, and flirts with, I've no doubt?"

In her inmost heart, however, she did not deceive herself. She felt that French did not admire Mrs. Darling; but there would be Margaret Carruth, and other girls like her, — gentle, refined, with no abruptness. He would talk to them all the evening, dance with them, perhaps.

Althea's eyes glowed in her musing. "They talk pearls and diamonds," she thought, and her chair stopped rocking. "There is n't one of them who would n't as lieve say 'damn' as 'swipe.'" She said this aloud, and sprang to her feet, feeling bitterly, strangely alone.

Half the night through she tossed and turned. "Why *do* I care so much?" she kept asking herself. "There are plenty of people who do approve of me."

She heard French let himself in and come up to his room. "One thing sure," she thought feverishly, "I'll never let him know again that I care. — never!"

At the breakfast-table the circles around her eyes were the more noticeable for her cheerful manner. Usually Miss Gaylord was very non-committal at eight A. M. This morning she talked, even rallying French on the late hour at which his night-key fitted into the lock.

He received her remarks with his usual formal courtesy; but she thought he seemed surprised by her self-possession.

"He'll find out!" she thought triumphantly, as she went back upstairs to her room. "I shall treat him well, but — with a difference!"

In the middle of the morning, while Althea was practicing at the piano, a florist's box was handed in at her door. Her heart beat faster as she unwrapped it, for she suspected its significance. "It can't alter facts," she thought, as she untied the string with unsteady fingers. "He said what he thought was the truth, and since he does think that" — the cover came off, and the tissue paper, and bunches of violets, sweet and dewy, were revealed.



"Treat him well, but — with a difference," she thought mechanically. She picked French's card out of the box. On the back of it was scribbled: "I have hurt myself more than I have you. Won't you let it amount to something?"

Althea thought long, and smelled of the violets. Sweet, modest, quiet little flowers! Why had he selected them?

"It is n't your fault," she said to them at last, and she put them in water. Then, after more hesitation, she picked up the box. It was rather small, about the size of the one in the grate. At last she punched a hole through its side with the scissors, and stuck it on the empty nail. Then she went back to her practicing.

Somehow it would n't go. Her hand was tired. Her thoughts were still riotous. "I'll take a walk," she decided; and arraying herself, she went out of doors and betook herself to a shopping district.

An hour afterward Willard French at his desk was interrupted by an office-boy who handed him a small box.

He opened it without suspicion, for he had never seen the writing which addressed it.

In folds of tissue paper he felt something hard. Curiously he unfolded it, and came upon a toy magnet, the steel clinging close to its arms.

Around it was curled a bit of writing paper, and on this was written, "*United we stand!*"

French smiled, and after gazing at it a minute, he slipped box and contents into a drawer.

Althea's mignonne face kept coming between him and his figures that morning.

"And she wouldn't go into my room for Molly," was the irrelevant addition his thoughts made to each column.

## CHAPTER VII

### A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

MISS BEEBE, looking upon Miss Gaylord's career in Boston as largely the work of her own hands, had no mind to lose sight of it, although Althea proved but a coy correspondent.

Miss Luella wrote to the girl voluminously on thin paper with pale ink, and it was a mercy that she never knew the sort of reception those closely-written lines met in Newbury Street. Althea gave desperate glances at the devious twistings with which the thread of Miss Beebe's discourse wound in and out the pages of two or three sheets, sometimes leaping from first to third, sometimes beginning on the fourth and continuing — whither? The girl had no interest to find out.

"There ! if you can translate Miss Beebe's letters for me," she said with sudden inspiration to Willard French in the early days of her stay, "you 'll be a guide, philosopher, and friend worth having. I 'll let you off from ever going for the doctor at midnight. I 've studied on the thing for ten minutes, and I 'm all balled up. I 'm going to jump the job."

This being before the era of the slang-box,

French took the letter in silence and whistled softly as he regarded its interlined pages.

"Why doesn't she write to you, I'd like to know?" said Miss Gaylord aggrievedly.

"If you ever mention such a thing!" ejaculated Willard, with vague threatening.

"You'll have to be good to me then, or else I shall tell her you're jealous."

"Name the goodness you demand, and you shall have it if it's in the market!"

"First of all, read that letter."

"I don't believe I can," said French helplessly, turning over the slippery sheets. "Where does the thing begin?"

"That's it," said Miss Gaylord triumphantly. "Where does it? What did I tell you?"

"I guess you'd better be contented with small things, scraps, as it were. I'll read anywhere I can. If I see a head, hit it, you know."

"That'll suit me - just samples to answer it from."

"You're going to answer it?" said French, relieved. "That's a good girl." He much feared that if Althea did not give an account of herself, he would be the next one appealed to.

"Of course I shall have to write to her, if only to tell her not to be partial to me, right in the same house with you."

French looked up with such fire in his eye that Althea laughed wickedly.

"The bargain 's off," he announced, throwing down the letter, which promptly floated and slid off in three directions.

"No, no, it is n't!" said Miss Gaylord, with hasty contrition. "You 'll find there is n't any sharp serpent's tooth about me. I'm not a thankless child."

Upon which Willard again gathered up the fragments of Miss Luella's discourse and spread out the sheets like a fan.

"H'm, h'm!" he mused. "Here 's something: 'Pa's rheumatism is brighter' — no, no! — 'better than last year.'"

"As if I cared!" remarked Althea.

"Well, you ought to. Rheumatism is the deuce. I had it once after a game of football."

"I hope Boston climate argues' — no, — 'agrees with you. Remember what I shall' — no, — 'said, about — orchestras.'"

"She never said a word about orchestras. I don't believe she knows an oboe from a hobo."

French knotted his brow for a mighty effort. "'Orchestras'? No, it is n't; it's 'overshoes.' 'Remember what I said about overshoes.'"

"Chestnuts!" observed Althea. "Go on."

"Oh, yes! Go on!" repeated French, with biting sarcasm. "Very easy to say!" He bent to his task with straining brow. "The next four lines are written in Greek," he announced at last, with the calmness of despair. "I did n't know

Miss Luella was up to it. Mine is rusty. I shall have to skip it. H'm! h'm! What comes next, now? "The cab — hot — fire" — why, that does n't mean anything!"

"And there aren't any cabs in Springdale. Might n't it be 'cat'?"

"Cat? Oh yes!" relieved. "Cat. 'The cat' had — five — kittens' — There, Miss Beebe can write 'kittens'!" admiringly. "She ought to write that word for a living; 'past' — weep."

"Last week," goose! I should think you could use your imagination some!"

Possibly French thought this a labor-saving suggestion worth considering. At all events, he went on swimmingly. "I suppose you have entirely given up slang since you reached Boston."

"Hold your horses, my friend! She doesn't know I use any. Ha, ha! I caught you! It strained the gun awfully, but I was dumb in Springdale. Stick to business, young man!"

French obediently stammered on. "I — hope — you haven't had to — twinkle — no — 'trouble, Mr.' — no — 'Mrs. Carruth, or her daughter.'"

"Rats!" commented Althea.

"Loving Mr. French as you do" — he looked up with an appreciative smile. "Oh, I don't know," he remarked. "Reading your letters is n't so bad!"

"Why, of course, you can compose if you think

it is so funny," remarked Miss Gaylord, with pink cheeks.

"No, it's here, for a fact; but I'll hurry on."

"Yes, and cabs were there, and hot fires. You're an expert, you are. You'd better hurry back instead of on. Show me the place."

They put their heads together over the sheet.

"That's 'having,'" said Althea; and then she read: "'Having Mr. French as you do, close by, I am in hops' ('hopes,' I suppose) 'he can give you — whiskey'" — they both laughed.

"If that other is hops, this must be 'beer,' not 'whiskey,'" suggested French.

"Well, I can just tell her I should never have anything but milk if you had your way," retorted Miss Gaylord. "That next word is 'aid.' Oh, I see — 'whatever aid you need.' Oh! there's no use in going on. It will only be a rehash of great Carruth and good French. I know it like a song. I will send her a note that might have come out of the 'Complete Letter Writer,' and she'll never know the difference."

But Miss Beebe did know the difference. She was disappointed by the brief, uncommunicative, and proper little notes which Althea sent her.

"It's a pity the child is so self-contained," she thought. "It was just the same here. It seemed hard always for her to express herself."

Miss Luella corresponded also with Mrs. Carruth at rare intervals, and from her she learned

that Miss Gaylord had been at her house and that she and Willard French seemed on friendly terms.

Miss Beebe was a stirring individual, and her monotonous life palled upon her very often. She "took longing fits" for Boston, as she expressed it, especially for the shopping-ground, where "bargains" had for her an irresistible fascination.

When the mood became too strong, she generally made some temporary arrangement to secure her father's comfort and took passage for the haven of her desires.

She had a standing invitation at the Carruths', but she did not always avail herself of it. If she stopped at a hotel, she felt the greater freedom to haunt the dry-goods stores; and it charmed her to lunch at restaurants and eat Nesselrode pudding.

One of Althea's conservative letters started the "longing fit" one day.

"If she only would take time to tell me how she's got her room fixed up, or how she enjoys the Symphonies, or what she thinks of the Carruths!" she complained upon finishing Miss Gaylord's three pages; and then Miss Luella fell to musing upon whether a certain one of her neighbors could come into her house and take the reins for a few days. When she got as far as this she knew, herself, that she was going to yield. It might take some days of reconsidering, but in the end she would go to Boston.



This time her desires were helped on by the arrival of a letter from Mrs. Carruth, which came soon after Althea's.

"I have been wishing lately that you lived near enough for me to talk to you occasionally," it said. "In some moods nobody can take the place of an old friend, one whose memories of twenty-five years ago are the same as your own; and I have very few such friends, Luella."

A feeling of elated affection swelled Miss Beebe's breast. It was something to hold a unique position of friendship with Mrs. Richard Carruth. It is to be feared that old Mr. Beebe's rheumatism would have needed to be very bad to keep her now, faithful daughter as she was.

"Emeline needs me. That is plain. If she, whose whole life is spent doing for others, wants something from somebody else occasionally, she ought to have it."

So Miss Beebe packed her bag, dressed in her best black silk and her solid gold jewelry, and took the train for Boston with as happy and excited a heart as was ever carried by a young girl out for a holiday.

The Carruths gave her the usual welcome, and she ensconced herself in the chamber which was always hers when she came, with a feeling of importance and satisfaction in her circumstances which queens might envy.

She was not without tact, and her perceptions

led her not to question her busy hostess or urge her to talk.

"I'm right here now, and if Emeline wants me, she'll speak," she thought discreetly. "One of my first duties," she said to Mrs. Carruth, "is to see Althea Gaylord and find out just how things are with her, so I can write her mother."

Mrs. Carruth smiled at Margaret, for they had had some amusing discussions regarding the Denver girl.

"It seems that Mrs. Darling was already a friend of Miss Gaylord's before she came here," remarked Margaret, who sat near Miss Beebe, cutting the leaves of a magazine, while her mother was clearing out her writing-desk.

"You don't say so!" returned the little woman. "I must say, Althea is the worst letter-writer I ever met in my life! To think she should never tell me that she knew Mrs. Darling! Perhaps," added Miss Beebe, "she knew that I shouldn't fully approve of anything that would tempt her to late hours, and Mrs. Darling's best friends must admit that she does n't like a quiet life."

Miss Luella finished tentatively. She had her own opinion of the lively Molly, and it was a very decided one; but experience had taught her to follow the example of her hosts in refraining from comment upon her.

"I judge Althea has n't troubled you much?" she went on.

"Oh, not at all," replied Margaret.

"I warned her," said Miss Beebe virtuously. "I tried to make her understand."

"She seems like a very independent girl," said Mrs. Carruth. "I hope her winter's experiment will be a successful one. I should n't like to think of Margaret a thousand miles away in a strange city, with no one to look after her; but I know mothers are unselfishly doing that thing every day."

Miss Beebe bridled a little. "Why, I have an eye to Althea myself!"

Mrs. Carruth smiled. "Your eyesight must be excellent, Luella."

"I assure you it's a great comfort to Mrs. Gaylord to know that I stand ready."

"No doubt. Moral support is a great thing."

"And if Margaret were in Althea's place," went on Miss Beebe, who did not like to have the arrangements upon which she had so prided herself unappreciated, "she would have Willard French at her elbow, you must remember."

Mrs. Carruth wiped the dust from the far corner of a pigeon-hole. "It might be, though," she suggested, "that Willard wouldn't be the man whom I should wish Margaret to fall in love with."

"To fall in love with!" ejaculated Miss Beebe, aghast, and had the dark, close-curl'd locks on her forehead had a little more intimate relation with

her scalp, they would have risen in protest. "What do you mean, Eu-tue?"

"Nothing: only such things do happen, you know: and you have smoothed the way this time."

"I? For pity's sake!" exclaimed Miss Luella in a tremor. "Why, I shall go to bed *sick* if you say such things! Have you noticed anything? Do you think it has — has happened?" She turned her head in jerks, like a frightened bird, from mother to daughter, and back again, with such sincere trepidation that Margaret laughed.

"I think mother is teasing you, Miss Beebe."

"Why, she came here," said Miss Luella in dismayed protest, "she came here to study — to study, and for nothing else, nothing else. I can't think that she would be so." She searched for a word, and finally decided on "unreasonable" as to — to — why, I must go to see her at once!"

Miss Beebe sprang up.

"You mustn't think so much of a mere flight of my imagination," said Mrs. Carruth. "We don't know Miss Gaylord well at all: and as for Willard, probably such an idea is as remote from his mind as it was from yours."

"I must go to see her," repeated Miss Luella nervously.

"Well, be careful," Mrs. Carruth laughed. "Remember the mother who told her child that he must never put beans in his nose. He had never thought of such a thing until that moment,

then the suggestion fascinated him. Be careful."

"Oh, I shall be," returned Miss Luella devoutly.

If Althea's fate were of interest to her before, now it was far more so. This young, innocent, inexperienced girl had been brought to the great city and placed by Miss Beebe herself in a position where her closest friend was a young man of marriageable age!

Miss Beebe, as she tripped along the street, considered French from this new standpoint. She recalled again that he was twenty-six years old, and attractive.

Suddenly a thought arrested her. She stood still on the sidewalk. "Emeline said he would n't be the man she would wish Margaret to fall in love with. I ought to have questioned her. What did she mean?"

Oh! this was all very romantic, and Miss Beebe was deliciously miserable and very much excited. She had brought this about herself — herself! What would Mr. and Mrs. Gaylord say! They had money, though French had n't. Yes, it was fervently to be hoped that Mrs. Carruth was wrong, and that Althea was still the same passive, steady, unemotional girl who had left her a few weeks ago in Springdale.

Arrived at the boarding-house, Miss Beebe found that her protégée had gone out to take her

music-lesson. The maid said that she would return soon, so the visitor was shown up to Miss Gaylord's room, where she laid off her jacket.

She recalled the last time she was here, and her visit with French. She remembered that he had not been very cordial with regard to the advent of Althea, and that she had reproached him. Now they had been near neighbors for a sufficient length of time for him to know Miss Gaylord far better than Miss Beebe herself did. She could not have been convinced that any one could know Willard better than she did. When one has lived next door to a boy for years, furnished him on many occasions with bread and butter and jam, scolded him, petted him, even on one occasion spanked him, it isn't to be expected that one should admit that any acquaintance of a few weeks could supersede her.

She looked around the room approvingly. It was a typical boarding-house apartment, except that on a dressing-table were numerous toilet articles of silver, and that near the fireplace stood a little tea-table with a kettle and three cups and saucers.

"She's just as neat as a pin, Althea is," thought the visitor. "That goes with her sober, demure little face and ways. She ought to have lived in Puritan times."

Just here Miss Beebe caught sight of a paste-board box nailed to the wall, and regarded it curi-

ously. It had a slit in the top. "I wonder what that's for?" she thought.

A voice suddenly sounded, singing up the stairs a popular song of the day, and Althea came into the room, throwing her music-roll into a chair before she saw Miss Luella.

Miss Gaylord started. "Great — Miss Beebe!" she exclaimed. "How you scared me!"

She received her guest's effusive kiss with faint return. "Why, I didn't even know you were coming to Boston!"

"Of course not. I wanted to surprise you, my dear, and I did, didn't I? You write such short, unsatisfactory letters, I had to come myself and see what you were doing, and how you were doing it."

"It is very good of you," said Althea, removing her hat. "My life is n't so wildly interesting that it will take you long to hear about it."

Her guest was regarding her with curious scrutiny. "Why, I can see already that it is agreeing with you here. You look as bright as a dollar. I shall be able to write your mother nice things about you; but I suppose you tell her everything that happens to you?"

"Pretty nearly."

"Why not everything?" inquired Miss Luella quickly.

"Oh," — Althea shrugged her shoulders, — "art is long and time is fleeting, you know, and I

have to practice a lot." Her guest was looking at her scrutinizingly, yet with such kindly eagerness that the girl smiled as she seated herself.

"Well, I'm glad to know somebody gets good letters from you," sighed Miss Luella.

"Yes, I know I'm bad. I wonder you don't drop me altogether."

"Indeed, my dear, I have n't so many interests in this world that I can afford to do that." There was something in the naïve honesty of the reply that touched Althea.

"You'll find I can talk faster than I can write," she responded.

"Then tell me about yourself," said Miss Beebe, settling back comfortably in her chair and beginning to rock. "First, your room. It turns out pretty well, does n't it?"

"Oh, yes."

"You've made it look real pretty. I've been taking an inventory while I waited for you: but what's that box for on the wall? It looks as if you had a nickel-in-the-slot arrangement."

Miss Gaylord nodded. "That is for frogs and snakes," she replied.

Miss Beebe's chair nearly over-turned in the violent retreat of its rockers.

The girl's eyes twinkled. "Drop a nickel in the slot and see them come out," she drawled, laughing.

"What are you talking about, you crazy child?"



“Well, that ’s what Mr. French calls them. It ’s only a slang-box, Miss Beebe, — a box for my fines.”

“Is that boy teaching you slang?” Miss Luella’s tone was severe.

“No, indeed. He wants me to use the English language instead of American slang. At least, so he says.”

“I rather guess there ’s no danger,” said Miss Beebe, bridding. “He ’d better throw his pipe out the window before he criticises you, I think. As if you would ever be a slangy girl!”

Althea colored and looked interestedly out at the sky. “I hope it won’t occur to her to shake that box,” she thought.

“Now you ’re going to play to me, are n’t you?” said the guest, settling back again in anticipation.

“I ’m sorry I can’t. I ’m only digging away at exercises yet. You won’t find anything but a chrysalis here. You ’ll have to go over to the Carruths’ for the full-fledged butterfly. Is n’t Miss Carruth’s playing out of sight?”

“As the boys say,” added Miss Luella, with a little apologetic clearing of her throat, “as Willard French says, most likely,” she continued.

Miss Gaylord opened her purse, took thence a penny, and it jingled into the box. “That ’s the way we do it,” she said airily. “But is n’t Miss Carruth’s music fascinating?”

"Yes, indeed. I often think, when I'm at home there, with nothing much to do on a dull afternoon, what would I give to have Margaret come in and sing all my blues away!"

"Sing? Oh, yes. Mr. French says she does; but I've never heard her."

"When you do, you won't forget it," said Miss Beebe impressively. "I was glad to hear you had been to their house. Well, are n't they splendid people?" she finished, with that awed tone in her voice which Miss Gaylord remembered irreverently.

She gave an off-hand nod. "They've been very good to me. Miss Magnet's a girl after my own heart,—no," added Althea honestly, "I mean she's after my own head. I admire her. I mean to see a lot of her."

There was a certain rigidity about Miss Luella's pose. "You can hardly hope for that. She is so occupied."

"She makes time for me, all right," responded Miss Gaylord lightly. "See those three teacups? She gave them to me, and had tea with me a couple of days ago. She said she brought two for company, and a third for a crowd."

"I'm pleased to hear it,—pleased," declared the visitor.

"I think the crowd may possibly be Mr. French sometimes after this."

"You have probably grown very well acquainted

with Mr. French by this time," suggested Miss Beebe, approaching delicate ground cautiously.

"Why, of course," said Althea coolly. "He's so frightfully proper, though, he has never been in here yet. Some evening, perhaps, if I have Miss Carruth inside and the maid posted outside, and the party breaks up at nine o'clock, he may trust himself in these dominions."

"Very nice," observed Miss Luella approvingly. "Willard has a great deal of nice feeling." She drew herself up slightly. "I made no mistake in placing you here, it seems."

"So far as he is concerned, no indeed," said Miss Gaylord, repressing a yawn. "We speak as we pass by, but not much more than that. He is a high-flyer in society, while I am strictly a woman of business."

"And are happy in it," added Miss Beebe. This indifference might be assumed. She scrutinized the girl closely.

"Yes," said Althea, casting a look askance at a work on harmony which lay on the piano, "as happy as anybody can be who has to steer clear of Consecutive Fifths."

"All Greek to me, my dear; but do tell me now, while I think of it, how you came to know Mrs. Darling."

"At a resort out West."

"Do you see much of her?" The speaker's anxious tone was not lost upon her companion.

"Why? Do you want me to cultivate her?"

Miss Beebe looked mysterious.

"I don't know just how much I ought to say, Althea; but this much I surely may. She isn't a woman that I should want you to imitate! She is light-minded. She really is."

"Yes, I've discovered that myself," observed Althea, smiling out the window.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONFIDENCES

MISS BEEBE returned to the Carruths' in a very cheerful state of mind. She had just taken off her things and was feeling on the best terms with herself and the world, when Mrs. Carruth came into her room.

"Well, Emeline, my child is all right," she announced brightly. "I've had a real good time with her."

Mrs. Carruth seated herself and listened as her friend talked for some time of Althea's parents and their circumstances.

"I've seen pictures of their home, and it's elegant," said Miss Luella; "and I do think when a girl is willing to leave all those luxuries and go to a strange city and live alone up two flights of stairs and work all by herself, it shows a good deal of character."

"Young people like the novelty," returned Mrs. Carruth. "The idea looks attractive to many of them. I think it does to Margaret. She seems to feel an interest in this little Althea of yours that I can account for in no other way."

"Well, now, that's good, for it will be a benefit

to Althea to associate with Margaret, and it won't do Margaret any harm to get away from fashionable life some."

"She doesn't care for that, you know," said Mrs. Carruth, looking off thoughtfully. "Her heart is not in it."

"No, I didn't mean in the sense of being wrapped up in it. I know well enough that you and she spend a great part of your lives in far different surroundings."

"But her heart is not in that, either." It was a very sad voice that Miss Beebe heard, and she turned to her friend quickly. "Her heart is not in anything we do," went on Mrs. Carruth slowly, "but she loves me and trusts me so completely that she does her best and never complains."

"But where is her heart, then?" Miss Lucella's sympathies sprang out quickly at her friend's sad tone. "How ungrateful!" —

"Oh, hush!" Color surged up over Mrs. Carruth's forehead and cheeks. "It is one of the most crushing thoughts that come to me, that Margaret might sometime do something for me from gratitude. She loves me so dearly now. I don't believe a daughter ever loved her mother more." She cast an appealing glance at Miss Beebe, who responded with an emphatic nod.

"Of course she does. Why shouldn't she? But what do you mean, Emeline, about her heart? Has she fallen in love with the wrong man?"

"No, nothing of that kind. It is her voice, her beautiful voice. She wants to use it professionally. She wants to devote her life to it, to break up our companionship, our home, — not to belong to me any more, but to the public!"

"Crazy child! She does n't know what she's talking about."

"I don't think she does. I have a long time been living in hope that she would content herself at home with the many uses for her music that are continually offering: but instead, a little wall — a thin wall, but still a barrier — has grown up between us."

"You don't tell me such a thing!" Miss Beebe moved close to her friend.

"Yes. I can't speak of it to any one, least of all to Margaret. I talk and laugh, and she talks and laughs, but neither of us is happy, and I — am wretched!"

"Why, Emeline, my dear friend! What am I hearing! What a return for" —

"Hush!" Mrs. Carruth looked up with dry, bright eyes. "Margaret does n't owe me anything," she said quickly.

The two women regarded each other for a silent minute. At last Miss Beebe spoke.

"Every daughter owes her mother a great deal."

"Yes," said the other, with bitter significance.

"How are you so sure she is n't happy?" pursued Miss Luella. "You'll have to give me some

proof, or I can't help believing that you imagine a great deal."

"She never sings."

"What!"

"No. Until Sunday she had not sung a song for months. Then, to please me, she sang at my Mission, and she was pale for the rest of the evening."

"I call her a selfish girl!" announced Miss Beebe with fervor.

"So should I if it were anybody but Margaret," said the mother listlessly; "but I know Margaret, and I see her trying to do right in every other way. I have thought of it a great deal at night—I don't have time to think during the day—and I have tried to reconcile what seems her obstinacy in this matter with her behavior in other regards. It seems to me that perhaps her feeling for what she believes to be her vocation is something like what her love for a man might be. If she were suffering from an unrequited affection, it would n't be reasonable in me to insist that she see the man and meet him on friendly terms, instead of avoiding him altogether."

"You're a smart woman, Elneline Carruth! You can think out everything, and you're very good to excuse that child; for, you can say what you've a mind to, she has no business to keep you awake nights."

"I still hope that this is a phase, and will pass.



My greatest ally would be a man, if a desirable one should present himself and Margaret could love him."

"There must be a lot after her," remarked Miss Beebe.

"Yes. She has received several proposals, but no one has touched her heart. She knows that her money is an attraction, and for a long time — far longer than I at first suspected — she has kept her hopes fixed on a career so steadily that there has been no room for the light and passing attachments which most girls experience. It is the danger of a woman interested in outside work, as I have been, that she sometimes misses an intimate knowledge of her child's inmost thoughts and wishes. All through Margaret's young girlhood I tried to keep her eyes fixed outside, on the greatest good to the greatest number. I woke one day to find that she had escaped me. I no longer understood her thoughts."

"What a pity it does seem!" said Miss Luella. "If Margaret were only a poor girl, now!"

Mrs. Carruth looked straight into her friend's eyes. "That is the point," she said slowly. "You know that if Margaret had her rights, she would be a poor girl."

"Rights? Why — what a queer — I should think" — stammered Miss Luella, unable to meet the piercing regard bent upon her, and looking here and there in her embarrassment.

"Can't you see what makes this misery to me? To think that a day might come when Margaret would stand before me and accuse me of stealing her birthright, of stifling her talent, of stultifying her nature, of lending her to my own purposes? She could do all that if she did not love me, and what could I answer? Nothing!"

Mrs. Carruth buried her tearless eyes in her hands.

"Now, now, Emeline, hush!" softly exclaimed her guest, in much distress. "The child might come in. Who ever would tell her? You know we always said that!"

"Yes, we always did. More fools we," returned Mrs. Carruth, again looking up. "It is a fool's paradise a woman makes for herself when she does what I did. That day when you brought the sweet little baby to my empty arms and she looked up at me with such mystery in her eyes, and I put my cheek against her head — I can feel it now, silky as a butterfly's wing — I took her into my heart and made her mine. I said then: 'She shall never know I am not her mother. She must be all mine.'"

"And that was right," said Miss Beebe soothingly.

"Right?" exclaimed Mrs. Carruth sharply. "It was wrong — all wrong! It is one of the cruellest mistakes a woman can make. Sooner or later the truth will turn into a sword of Damocles hang-

ing over her head by a single hair, ready to fall and destroy at a blow her child's faith and love!"

"Why, Emeline! I had forgotten it. Everybody has. If they had n't, there is n't a creature on earth mean enough to do you such an injury."

"I suppose not, and yet — this vagary of Margaret's has awakened fear out of a twenty years' sleep. There is one person whom I have always intended to tell when the time came, and that is her lover, when she looks on one with favor."

"She will, one of these days, now don't you fret. As you say, when she falls in love, that will settle all this matter of the stage in quick metre; and as for destroying Margaret's faith in you, what is going to do that, even if she should learn the truth some day? That lover you tell about it may tell her."

"Not if he *is* a lover. No indeed! O Luella! it sounds like an easy and excusable thing to keep the truth concerning her birth from an adopted child; but no one can do it without finding herself started on a chain of white lies as long as life itself. As soon as a child is old enough to know that she has been born at all, she wants to know where and when. She asks innumerable questions as she grows up, comments on inherited traits, has pride and love of family woven into the warp and woof of her nature, until if at maturity the truth is suddenly disclosed, the shock, the sense of betrayal" — Mrs. Carruth suddenly rose and began

pacing the floor. "In Margaret's case, she is so the soul of honor and integrity — The thought makes such a coward of me that at moments I am ready to let her take her own course."

She walked on, apparently forgetful of Miss Beebe, who followed her with helpless, troubled eyes. At last she spoke again.

"I have not told you of one hope that has come to me lately."

"Do tell me, you poor girl!"

"It is that the lover has arrived."

"Emeline!"

"He is a man lately come to Boston. He seems very much interested in Margaret, and as for her, I have noticed more spontaneity in her behavior when he is near than at any other time."

"And you approve of him?"

"All that I can discover is in his favor."

"Oh! I do hope it may turn out so!" said Miss Beebe devoutly. "These girls who are too well off need a little roughing-it to bring them to their senses; but with some, marriage takes the place of it. Not that I should want Margaret's marriage to be anything but happy, but I guess she'll look back many a time to the flowery paths of ease she has now. What's the man's name, if you don't mind?"

Mrs. Carruth stopped walking, and leaned on a chair. "It is a delicate matter to mention after what I have said."

"Just as you think best, dear," returned Miss Luella meekly. "He is certainly a very fortunate man if you and Margaret both look favorably upon him."

"I'll find out who he is before I leave this place, or my name is not Luella Beebe," thought the little woman, "and I hope to goodness Margaret Carruth will get married and settle down, and stop all this hifalutin nonsense. I wish she'd speak to me about it. I'd give her some of the straightest talk she ever heard in her life."

She sought out Margaret in the afternoon of the same day, with the hope of entrapping some confidence.

She found the girl in her own room, and was received kindly.

"I have to come in and see what new pretty things you've been getting," she announced.

"That's right," returned Margaret, who had been sitting at her desk in a negligée gown, attending to a pile of notes and bills, but who rose with pleasant alacrity.

"I guess you've got the prettiest girl's room in Boston," remarked Miss Beebe, looking about at the violet and white furnishings and decorations. From the cosy corner to the upright piano, the delicate color scheme was charming to the eye. Margaret herself, in the violet negligée, whose loose silken folds fell away from round throat and wrists, looked as if unfit for coarser surroundings.

"Just a little better than being brought up on charity in Springdale," thought the visitor bitterly.

"Will you sit down, Miss Beebe, or do you prefer to make a tour of discovery?"

"What is there to discover? New pictures, new friends? You know I admire to see photographs."

"I'm not sure if I have any new ones. Let us see." Margaret took a basket of pictures and sat down beside her friend. "I think you have seen most of these. No, here is a new one, I'm sure."

Miss Beebe seized the photograph of a smooth-faced man. "Now, I think Willard French ought to give me one of these!" she said, looking with interest into the familiar eyes.

"No doubt he would be pleased to do so."

"I guess he's been real kind to Athena Gaylord; but I don't believe she's in love with him."

"I hope you didn't ask her if she were," said Margaret smiling.

"Oh, I know a thing or two!" responded Miss Beebe, tossing her head. "I used to think, Margaret, that perhaps you might fancy Willard yourself."

"I do fancy him. I'm fond of him."

"You might go further and fare worse, I can tell you."

"I should as soon think of marrying my brother. This is a pretty group, this bridal party. See the maid of honor."

“Why, it ’s you, ain’t it?”

“Yes; that makes the third time I have been a bridesmaid.”

“Look out, Margaret! Look out!”

“Why?”

“You must n’t be bridesmaid too often or you may never be bride.”

“Not every girl needs to be a bride. See how independent and happy you are.”

Miss Beebe put one hand on the girl’s soft gown. “Don’t you take up with any such notion as that, my dear! When Mr. Right comes along, you take him! There won’t be any reason why you should n’t. Mine came—but he had to go to Australia—and there was Pa—so I stayed home. Perhaps your mother has told you.”

Margaret nodded, and her smooth hand closed over the one on her knee. “How brave you were!” she murmured. “How good!”

“Lots of other women are doing it every day,” said Miss Beebe, resuming her cheery manner, “being just as brave and just as good. ‘This world is not our rest,’ you know.”

“But to feel sure he was Mr. Right and then to let him go,—to give him up!” said Margaret with slow musing. “It is like”—she paused.

“Like any other laying down of life, or taking up of cross,” said Miss Beebe. “We all have it to do sometime. Who would shirk?”

The girl caught her lip in her teeth for an in-

stant. "I think life is very bewildering, Miss Luella."

"Of course; but one day at a time is all we have to travel, and after a while we shall get there where things will be plainer. A good husband is a good partner to have on the journey, Margaret. I don't want you should go without one."

The girl's lips were parted as she looked unseeingly at the photograph of the bridal party.

"Come now," — confidentially, — "you might tell your oldest friend something about the man who wants you."

Margaret started from her reverie. "Nobody wants me, — nobody," she said, so swiftly, that her companion smiled. "That is — nobody new — nobody interesting."

"Well, tell me about somebody interesting, even if he doesn't want you."

"No." The girl colored under the sharp little eyes. "There is nothing to tell. We have our routine, just the same as ever. The story of one of our weeks is just like the story of another."

"But you must always be meeting new people."

"Occasionally, of course; but" — Margaret sighed — "there is not much difference between them beyond their names."

Miss Beebe, baffled, returned to the photographs, and examined them all, from time to time asking questions, but finding nothing to satisfy her curiosity.



At last she finished them, and leaning back, appeared ready for further entertainment.

"Do you know, Margaret, it just happened I didn't once hear you sing the last time I was here?"

The girl replaced the photographs on a table.

"I'm exactly in the right mood now for a song," continued the visitor. "Do sit down at that pretty piano and sing to me."

"I'm sorry, Miss Beebe, but it is out of tune. I am expecting the tuner to-day."

"Oh, it will surely do for just touching along chords."

"Alas! no! It has been neglected, and I only yesterday discovered its condition."

So, pleasantly, Margaret evaded her guest's request, and Miss Luella's sharp ears could discover no feeling in the refusal beyond that which the words expressed.

It was the Carruths' evening at home, and Miss Beebe reasoned that if the unknown gave the promise of being a lover worth having, he would not absent himself on this occasion.

"It won't do any harm for me to know who it is," she argued, "for, of course, I shouldn't tell a living soul. Nobody can blame me for keeping my eyes and ears open if I keep my mouth shut."

Miss Beebe was not usually in favor of keeping her mouth shut. She enjoyed talking as much as the average woman, and her friend's at-homes gave

her an enjoyable opportunity. She knew the ways of the house, and several of its habitués were accustomed to the sight of the alert little woman in stiff black silk and gold chains, who tripped about with a sprightly company manner and accosted everybody, stranger or acquaintance. They were all Emeline's friends, and therefore hers.

Miss Gaylord, coming out from the dressing-room and meeting Willard French at the head of the stairway, commented on this:—

"Did you see Miss Beebe as we came in? Poor Miss Carruth! How she must wish country cousins were n't so fresh!"

"Oh, no, she does n't. Don't waste your pity. The Carruths are a law unto themselves, and Miss Beebe's all right — so long as she does n't write to a fellow."

"Well, I hope she'll let me alone," remarked Althea irrepressibly, as the two moved down the broad staircase side by side. "I'm here on business, and have n't time to dally with your Miss Lu."

"What business?"

"It is my own," returned the girl, in her gentle, saucy drawl.

"Didn't you say, 'United we stand,' yourself?"

"Well, then," said Althea, slightly flushing, "if you remember that, I should think you would know what my business is here."

At the foot of the stairs they encountered Miss Beebe, who regarded them approvingly.

French greeted her with a smile. "You find me carrying out your instructions, Miss Lu, — escorting Miss Gaylord wherever she wants to go; was n't that it?"

"Yes, Willard, you've fulfilled all my expectations." Miss Beebe cast a parting nod at Althea, who moved away to where Mrs. Carruth was talking to some people.

"Train up a child — you know," returned French: "and you did, faithfully."

"Yes," said Miss Beebe, regarding him seriously. "You've done all I expected, and you've done enough. Do you understand?" significantly. "Enough. Stop now."

"I'm afraid you're being deep, Miss Lu."

"I guess you can follow me, seeing you went through Harvard College."

"Ah! Now you wither me!"

"It don't seem more than a month since I punished you for breaking my window, Willard French, and there you are — a grown-up man in a dress suit."

French smiled. "And what has that to do with my following you?"

"I'd take Althea Gaylord out of your house if I could. I put her in on your account; and I'd take her out on your account."

"What is there so wrong in my wearing a dress suit?"

"I put her in there because you were a human being. I'd like to take her out because you're a man."

"Now, as a friend, Miss Beebe," he said, softly and confidentially, coming so close to her that his white enamelled studs approached her nose, "as your friend and well-wisher, I would advise you after this to put a little more water in it."

"In what?"

"Well — in whatever you're in the habit of taking."

"You impudent boy! I'm a white ribboner."

"Then behave like one, Miss Lu. Don't alarm your friends."

"I feel responsible for Althea Gaylord."

"So do I. You made me."

"Well, don't. Don't any more. She is at home now. You've been very kind" — Miss Beebe spoke hastily, then paused. "Willard, I'm often a very foolish woman. There is probably something queer about my brain, for I never can think of more than one thing at a time: but I can talk to you now, can't I, as one human being to another?"

"I don't know. You very truly observed a minute ago that I am a man."

"But there is a plane where we are both angels," said Miss Luella excitedly. "I can ask you to come up on that plane with me."

French flapped his elbows against his sides with

alacrity. "My pinions are a little feeble. I'm afraid you'll have to give me a tow; but I can't resist such flattery as that."

"If I only knew," Miss Luella gazed at him musingly; "if I only knew whether you would ever think of putting beans in your nose if I did n't suggest it."

"Well," French paused in his exertions. "I confess that had never occurred to me as forming one of the diversions of the elect."

"Willard, dear, Willard! That is irreverent!"

"I'm only following you."

"I wanted to talk about Althea."

"I notice you usually do when you are with me."

"But now I want to talk the other way — to warn you off where once I urged you on."

"Oh! Ah!" with eyebrows raised in enlightenment.

"I don't want you, yourself — and I don't want you to make her — she might grow dependent — and all my fault — I don't think she is" — hastily — "I have n't seen the least sign of it — but then, it might be — and her people so far away, and — O Willard," desperately, "do tell me you understand me!"

"My dear Miss Beebe, it is with modest pride in my own penetration that I admit I do get a sort of glimmering of your meaning."

"And you will heed me, Willard!"

"Did I ever fail to? I will say to Miss Gaylord the very first time we are alone" —

"Willard French!" Miss Beebe grasped his arm. "You give me palpitation!" She shook him nervously. "This is strictly between ourselves. It's the most delicate matter in the world! I stand as guardian to Althea."

"Joint — joint guardian."

"And I've confided in you on a very high plane, — up above petty considerations. Remember the angel in you, Willard. You're a young man now, full of jokes, but you'll be an angel forever!"

French squared his shoulders complacently. "Well, no fellow could resist such an assurance as that. I give you my word then, as angel to angel, that I'll — do my best. Angels can do no more."

"You can see I'm not joking," persisted Miss Beebe.

"When I reach the privacy of my own apartment and can examine my arm, I expect to be convinced of it."

"I'm afraid I did pinch you a little, Willard," contritely.

"Just enough to convince me that we are still in the flesh. You don't want me to be too transcendental. That's all right."

## CHAPTER IX

### MISS BEEBE'S QUEST

IN her excitement over the interview with French, Miss Beebe forgot momentarily her quest for the favored individual to whom Mrs. Carruth was looking for help.

Hardly had Willard left her, however, when the remembrance returned that this golden opportunity might not recur for a long time to come, and she began to look about her for new arrivals.

"There 's Mrs. Darling, as true as I live!" she thought, as she recognized the pretty woman bowing to right and left with an assured air. "Her bonnet ain't anything more than a butterfly, and it suits her exactly. I thought the man with her was Mr. Darling at first, but I might have known it would n't be. Wish he 'd turn around, so I could get a look at him."

The unspoken wish was fulfilled at once, and the tall man turned directly toward Miss Beebe.

"Where have I seen that face? Somewhere, I know. She'll introduce me. Good evening, Mrs. Darling," she added aloud, as the couple approached.

Mrs. Darling's regard fell upon the little woman

with chill surprise. "How do you do," she said carelessly, and without offering to take the half-extended hand she moved gracefully on.

Wrath stirred Miss Beebe's breast and sharpened her memory. She met the eyes of Mrs. Darling's escort. "Good-evening," she said, accosting him. "I don't suppose you remember me, but we were introduced one evening on the street when I was with Willard French."

"I beg your pardon," said Vandyke, pausing courteously. "I have met so many new friends in the last month, that I'm rather dull at recalling faces sometimes."

"Tiresome old thing!" thought Mrs. Darling, regarding Miss Luella frigidly; but she was called aside at that moment by a friend and was obliged to respond.

"No wonder you don't remember me," said Miss Beebe brightly. "I'm Miss Beebe, an old friend of the Carruths, and of Willard French's, too. The light shone right on your face that night, so I remember you, but your name has gone from me." Miss Luella perked her head on one side inquiringly.

"Vandyke is my name."

"Oh! that's easy. I can remember it by your beard." Miss Luella gave a little laugh. He was looking at her attentively. No old friend of the Carruths could be totally uninteresting.

"I remember Willard's telling me that you



were a stranger here. I hope by this time you like Boston?"

"Profoundly, Miss Beebe."

"Going to make it your home, perhaps?"

"I expect to."

"Is this your first evening at the Carruths'?"

"No, I am glad to say."

Miss Luella gave a sharp little nod. "You won't find any nicer people."

"I don't wish to."

"Mrs. Carruth and I were children together. I've known Margaret ever since she was born."

"You are fortunate." Vandyke was smiling too now, and giving Miss Beebe that unconsciously genial look which so unexpectedly succeeded his impassive expression.

As she regarded him, suddenly she started, and both her thin ringed hands clasped over her heart. "Oh!" she ejaculated.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing! nothing! I—I have attacks. It is gone."

Her overmastering determination to get even with Molly Darling had for a time put to flight every other consideration; now the sudden conviction came to her that here was her man! No wonder Emeline agreed! No wonder! no wonder!

"I'm glad I've met you again, Mr. Vandyke," she said, swallowing in her excitement. "Any friend of the Carruths is a friend of mine."

"And I must say the same," returned her companion. "I'm sure I should always wish to have the Carruths' friends mine also."

"And that is why he is with Molly Darling! Oh, I wish I dared say something!" thought Miss Beebe; but discretion won the day. "I don't know where Miss Carruth is," she said, looking about vaguely. "She was here a minute ago."

"Thank you, I shall find her," responded Vandyke, bowing, as he moved on.

Miss Beebe hunted for a chair, and finding one, sat down. All her ambition to be chatty and sociable, to help Emeline in her labor of entertaining, was merged in the satisfaction of this discovery of hers. Not a doubt assailed her as to the identity of her hero. It could n't be anybody else! It should n't be anybody else! Perhaps if she were quick she might see their meeting to-night. At the thought, Miss Beebe sprang up so quickly that she bumped her head against the elbow of an elderly gentleman who had just reached forward to examine a crystal nestling in a bit of bronze.

"Beg pardon!" murmured Miss Luella, recognizing no obstacle, but hastening toward the music-room, while the curio seeker stared after her indignantly.

In her flight she reached Althea and caught her by the arm. "Where's Margaret, do you know? The music-room, I guess. Let's go and see."

They reached the door just as Vandyke ap-

proached the knot of people about Margaret. The latter turned and greeted him, then continued her conversation with the man she had been talking to, while Vandyke responded to a remark of Mrs. Darling.

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Miss Beebe.

"Watts on the mind?" inquired Althea.

"Oh — oh — nothing," returned her friend with embarrassment.

"You're blushing," said Miss Gaylord. "Miss Beebe, you're smitten!"

"With whom?"

"The man you're staring at, of course."

"Why, Althea!" The speaker hurriedly withdrew her gaze. "I hope I did n't stare."

"Your hopes are vain. You did. Of course you are smitten with him. He is the social lion of the winter. You'd know he was if you only watched Mrs. Darling."

"I" — Miss Beebe swallowed again. "Althea, I have a special interest in that man."

"That walks without talking, as the French say."

"But, dear girl, I really have, and I wish — I wish Molly Darling was in Africa! She is" — Miss Beebe hesitated, shocked at her own implication to a young girl that a married woman could stray into paths of flirtation, — "she is a distracting sort of woman to steady people, and Mr. Vandyke looks like a solid, serious sort of man."

"Indeed he is. If he were not, I'd have a go at him myself," remarked Miss Gaylord.

"My dear Althea!" remonstrated Miss Luella.

"Why, of course. One wants to be in fashion; but I don't want to go into society, so I don't meet him often. Miss Magnet is as sweet as peaches. She says she'll get me bids if I want them, but she says I should be bored, and I know I should be. If Mrs. Darling got invitations for me, they would n't be prosy ones."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, she goes to plenty of balls and theatre parties and things. Poor Miss Magnet has to tote around after big bugs and philanthropists and such people so much, she does n't get much chance to frisk."

"Well, I'm very glad for you that you don't get into Mrs. Darling's set, my child. Where would your studies go to?"

"It's a conundrum; I never guess them."

"Mr. Vandyke does n't look like the frisking sort."

"No, indeed; so the joke now is to see Mrs. Darling interesting herself in literature and the fine arts!"

Miss Beebe regarded her laughing companion dubiously. "In that way she will certainly be more companionable to that good man, her husband," she responded primly.

Miss Gaylord drew the corners of her small

mouth down. "Yes indeed. Everybody knows that is why she does it."

"Althea, said Miss Luella warningly, "let us assume that she does."

"Oh, but I'm so unassuming!" retorted Miss Gaylord.

Miss Beebe had it on her mind to make an experiment this evening. "I can do it so innocently," she reasoned, "and it's so natural that I should ask it, it can't do any harm any way, and I'd like to know what excuse Margaret Carruth can give in decency. She knows that I know she has n't got a cold."

She turned to Althea again. "You say you've never heard Miss Carruth sing?" she asked.

"Never. Somehow we never have a chance."

"Why don't we ask her right now?" suggested Miss Luella.

"You do it."

"I'm going to." Miss Beebe suited the action to the word and advanced resolutely to where Margaret was talking, with her back to Vandyke and Mrs. Darling.

"Margaret, excuse me, my dear," she said, with her airy company manner, "but there are a number of us here who are anxious to hear you sing."

The little knot of people about all began a gentle applause with murmurs of approbation.

Miss Carruth looked down at her mother's friend with concealed annoyance. "This is not

one of our musical evenings, Miss Beebe. Please wait," she said pleasantly.

"Ah, but you know I can't wait. I must go home to-morrow, and I'm so anxious to hear you, Mr. Vandyke, help me to persuade her."

"Mr. Vandyke does n't wish to hear me sing to-night," said Margaret equably. "He will tell you so." She turned as she spoke, and looked gravely at her friend. "He knows the unwritten rules of the house."

"All very well," remarked Miss Luella briskly, "but there are exceptions to all rule." She was so interested in watching the long gaze exchanged between the pair that she scarcely knew what she was saying, but she prattled on. "When you have friends here from the country, you should remember the narrowness of their privileges and be generous. Don't you think so, Mr. Vandyke?"

He hesitated before answering: "I hardly know what to say, Miss Beebe. I, myself, am still waiting to hear Miss Carruth sing."

"And I've never heard her, either," added Althea.

"It is a very strange circumstance," remarked Mrs. Darling sweetly, "that the person who really has a voice to soothe the sorrows of this wicked world is usually so unwilling to use it, while those screechers who only add to our woes need but the smallest encouragement to wreak their worst upon us. Margaret, dear, aren't you the least bit

selfish? It seems to me you refuse so often lately. I only wish," with a pretty sigh, "I had the power to give so much pleasure."

Miss Beebe felt righteous indignation for the smile which the speaker gave Vandyke in closing.

"Well," she said, "I advise you to speak up for your rights as Miss Carruth's guest, Mr. Vandyke. She can't resist our united efforts."

Margaret smiled at the excited little woman. "Listen to me, Miss Beebe" —

"I want to. Mr. Vandyke" —

"Mr. Vandyke will not ask me. He does n't wish to hear me to-night."

"What is Margaret up to?" thought Mrs. Darling: and French, who was present, smiled curiously.

"I will go to Springdale," continued Miss Carruth, "within the month, if you ask me, and sing to you."

"You will, you busy girl?" Miss Beebe's face expressed astonishment.

"I will."

"And where" — Mrs. Darling's voice had an ominous sweetness — "where will you go to sing to Mr. Vandyke?"

"Mr. Vandyke has other things to think of," said Margaret coldly.

"You have a perfect right to feel hurt," said Mrs. Darling, looking up confidingly into the man's eyes.

"Oh, Miss Beebe is a good friend of mine," he remarked. "Perhaps she will telegraph me to come."

Mrs. Darling gave the pretty laugh that was part of her stock in trade. "Good! Then I shall be in it, for Margaret will need a chaperone, and of course she would rather have me than anybody: wouldn't you, Margaret?"

"And where do I come in?" asked Miss Gaylord plaintively. "Can't I go, Miss Magnet, to turn over the leaves?"

"Let us all go to Springdale," suggested French with enthusiasm: and there was a laughing murmur of assent from the others of the group.

Margaret gave Miss Beebe's hand a touch that was both reassuring and admonitory. "So it is all settled," she said low, with a little nod, and began to talk to Mosby, the artist, about a collection of pictures then exhibiting in Boston.

"Well, that is queer!" commented Miss Beebe, not only to herself but to Miss Gaylord, as they walked away together.

"It seems as if she must hate to sing," returned Althea confidentially. "Up at my room I've tried to get her to, but she always puts me off, and tells me to wait till I can accompany her to the queen's taste. I'll tell you what! I'd like to accompany her to Springdale! Do you think she meant it?"

"Oh, yes. Margaret always means what she says."



"Do you suppose she 'd let me go? And would you?"

"I would, of course, Althea; but I declare I don't know whether that strange, crazy child would or not."

Althea smiled and stared. "Do you realize what adjectives you are applying to your sacred white elephant?"

Miss Beebe started. "I was thinking out loud, my dear."

"I didn't know you indulged such profane thoughts," returned Miss Gaylord. "For my own part, I don't think Miss Magnet is such hot — I mean I don't think she's anything more than a tip-top human girl. She does seem freaky about singing; but may be she doesn't think her voice is any such great shakes after all, and she's modest. If everybody is like you, and looks at her through magnifying glasses, no wonder she'd rather be wise, like the owl, and keep still."

"Oh, she can sing," said Miss Beebe with decision; "she can sing the heart out of you, — or the heart into you, — just whichever you need to have done."

"Then she ought to do it for a living. It's a pity she does n't need to," said Miss Gaylord carelessly.

Miss Luella looked around at her quickly. "Did she ever say anything like that to you?"

"No, indeed. She never seems to want me to

believe she can sing. I scarcely ever think of it unless I hear some one teasing her. I just wish I could pipe up; I'd hire a hall quick."

"I'd like to see Margaret married," remarked Miss Beebe, with apparent irrelevance.

"Of course. She'd have a stunning wedding, I suppose. There's no telling, though. Mrs. Carruth has such a philanthropic bee in her chapeau, she'd just as like as not make her be married in one of the Settlement houses. She might take it into her head that the wedding would be an elevating sight for the *hoi polloi*; then that would settle it."

"Althea Gaylord, you're a case! Seems to me you've found a tongue in Boston, and a good long one."

"Had to," returned Miss Gaylord cheerfully. "I've had to be my own best friend, you know."

"Well, tell me, have you noticed that Margaret favors anybody?"

"A man person, do you mean?"

"Of course."

"Yes, everybody. She favors them all: men with waist-lines occasionally, but mostly men without waist-lines. They've mostly lost their waists by the time they've accomplished anything that moves the world along, and that's the kind whose 'isms' she has to take an interest in. Poor Miss Magnet!" Althea gave a one-sided smile and wink at her companion. "I'd just like to take

her mother's place and run her a month." The smile became a laugh. "There might be some trouble in getting her back into the traces. I'd show her how to frivol, and don't you — doubt it! Saved again!"

"Mr. Vandyke has a waist-line," suggested Miss Beebe, too much entranced by her ruling idea to reprove this audacity. "You said a little while ago he was a 'lion.'"

"Oh, yes, but — he's bespoken."

"What! Wh—what!" Miss Beebe's repetition came feebly, and she clutched her companion's arm. "Do you mean he's — engaged?"

"Well, you have got it bad!" commented Althea. "Pshaw, no! I only mean that the lion has turned into a lamb for the time being. Didn't you see that Mrs. Darling had a pink ribbon around his neck?"

'And everywhere that Molly went,  
That lamb was sure to go.'

"That's a different thing!" said Miss Beebe with relief. "Of course, it's bad enough," she added hastily, recollecting herself, with a tone of severity, "but he can't marry her. Where, Althea Gaylord, do you suppose Mr. Darling is?"

"He is at home with a cold. I heard her tell somebody. I think it's a frost, myself," added the girl for her own amusement, although aware that she was squandering a penny.

"Eh? Frosted his ears, did you say? That heartless jade!"

"No, no: just a plain cold. No trimmings."

Later in the evening Miss Beebe encountered French again.

"I've had a talk with that pleasant friend of yours, Mr. Vandyke," she said with interest.

"Oh! Remembered him, did you? I've noticed women do, without respect to age or color."

"Now, look here, Willard," — Miss Luella lowered her voice, — "that man is wasting his time with Mrs. Darling."

"What then?"

"Why, tell him so," suggested the little woman impetuously.

"Thanks, awfully! No!"

Miss Beebe gestured emphatically. "Mr. Darling is in Boston to-night."

"I know it."

"As little as he is here, shouldn't you think she'd stay home with him?"

"Should, if I did n't know her."

"I tell you, he's sick."

"Well, she will go home and give him an entertaining account of the evening."

"What do you suppose he thought of her coming here with that very striking man?"

"Took it for granted, and will call it square if she will only bring the very striking man home with her."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Darling is tremendously taken with Vandyke, who I suspect likes him much better than he does Molly. They hobnob together over their books and that. If it was n't for Van's eyes, he'd have bored Mrs. Darling stiff long ago. She's exhibiting him a lot these days, but he does n't know it. He's a queer duffer."

"How long before he will get tired of it, do you think, Willard?" asked Miss Luella, so earnestly that French smiled.

"Ask me an easier one!" he returned.

That night before retiring, Miss Beebe opened her door and closed it irresolutely two or three times before she at last hastened down the corridor to Mrs. Carruth's room and knocked.

Her friend, in wrapper and flowing hair, admitted her. She looked surprised to see Miss Beebe with her ornate "bang" removed, and her back hair twisted into a nub the size of a walnut.

"I just wanted to say, Emeline, — I really felt as if I could n't go to sleep till I had said that I — I admire Mr. Vandyke immensely."

Mrs. Carruth colored, smiled, and accepted the hand that her friend tucked into hers.

"Sharp eyes, Luella! You have sharp eyes!"

"But how could it be anybody else when a body has once seen him and talked with him?"

Mrs. Carruth nodded gravely. "He seems genuine. He wears well," she said.

"I shall be expiring to hear more," burst forth Miss Beebe.

"I pray that you may hear more: but there is nothing to tell as yet. You would better forget all about it."

"How can I, when it means so much to you?" Miss Beebe lowered her murmur to a whisper, and squeezed her friend's hand, and winked again and again as she continued: "I tried to get her to sing, and she would n't. She made him take sides with her: at least she would n't let him say anything. I think it really looked as if they had an understanding."

Mrs. Carruth shook her head. "No, that could n't be. Margaret is very reserved, and they are scarcely more than strangers."

Miss Beebe regarded her for a silent instant.

"Well, I'm going to say my prayers!" she announced at last, with something like a threat in her sibilant emphasis.

"That's right," — sadly. "God knows I say mine often enough. Good-night, Luella."

## CHAPTER X

### MISS GAYLORD RECEIVES

THIS outing was Miss Beebe's last for many a long day. Her father's rheumatic malady increased in severity, and she had heart and hands too full to send more than occasional thoughts toward her Boston friends. For this reason Margaret Carruth could not fulfill her promise of going to Springdale, — a relief which she did not express. Althea was disappointed, more on account of losing a possible excursion alone with her ideal than at the loss of hearing her friend sing. She worked away in her little room with dogged persistence, and whenever she heard Miss Carruth refer to a song, she promptly bought it and learned the accompaniment, thus establishing, as she fondly imagined, one more link between them.

Mrs. Darling had not sought her since their one exchange of calls, and the shrewd young girl thought she knew the reason for this. Her own chances for being drawn into her vivacious friend's inner circle had been lost in the influence that Burton Vandyke was at present exciting. Mrs. Darling had temporarily lost interest in those affairs to which, had she decided to be gracious to

Althea, she would have asked her. The girl had seen that Willard French stood high in Mrs. Darling's regard, and she believed that through him the lady would have come to recollect her existence from time to time, had it not been for the eclipse caused by Vandyke.

Miss Gaylord did not care. It amused her to watch Mrs. Darling's manœuvres, as she occasionally had opportunity, and the satisfaction of informal calls from Miss Carruth and the commendations of her teacher made life worth living.

She had laid down a law for herself, which was, not to count on Willard French. Guide and philosopher she was willing he should be; but friend he must be considered only in the most distant sense. She soon perceived how easy it would be to rely on the pleasure of seeing and being with him, and as their paths so seldom lay together, how insidiously a series of disappointments would undermine the firm fabric of her independence. When this conviction came to her she was at first inclined to avoid him: to plan her time for breakfast and dinner in such a way that they should not match his.

"I know you like a book, Allie," she said to herself sharply. "You think if you do that, he will miss you and hunt you up! But he would n't do it more than once. He has too much else to interest him. Just drop him right out of your calculations, honey. He is n't the only pebble on the beach."



Upon which Miss Gaylord's musings strayed west and she thought upon several pebbles whose faithful epistles bore witness to their determination not to be forgotten. For a girl whose existence had been so full of pleasant variety, the change to this present humdrum life was a test of good temper and resource. Althea knew it, and sometimes laughed at herself at the pride she took in "not giving in." At first her habit had been to wander into the parlor after dinner, knowing that French would follow her there to have the little confab which preceded his going out. But the first evening that French, finding himself short of time, had failed to appear, and she had heard him fleeing up to his room two steps at a time, the blank feeling of disappointment she had experienced started her on the line of reasoning indicated above.

Soon it began to happen often that Willard sought without finding her in the parlor; and yet so cleverly did she arrange matters, that there was no avoidance to be suspected.

Miss Carruth fell into the way of lending Althea the books she had been reading, and although two months ago Miss Gaylord would have dubbed them all prosy and discarded them instantly as out of the question, now her devotion led her to read them, carried along by the occasional marginal notes in the precious handwriting, which were like oases in the desert, cheering the weary traveler on her way.

She was sitting in her room thus employed one evening, when a knocking at the neighboring door attracted her attention. There was silence, then the knocking was repeated. She rose and went into the dimly lighted hall. "Mr. French is" — she began, then paused. "Oh, is it you, Mr. Vandyke? Mr. French is out."

"Ah! I thought perhaps he had fallen asleep, for I understood him to say he would expect me this evening."

"No, he has gone out."

Vandyke, as he spoke, came over to where Althea stood by her door.

"I do remember now. Mr. French told me you were a neighbor of his up here," he continued.

"Yes, this is my work-room," replied Miss Gaylord. "Won't you walk in?"

She had not in the least expected to say it, but as his glance wandered involuntarily toward the light, the words passed her lips; and in another instant, to her amusement, Burton Vandyke was in her room, looking at her piano and the music neatly piled up.

"Sit down, won't you?" she asked, and he complied. "I can't work nights, you understand," she went on. "I tried it, but the boarding-house worm will turn quicker than any other sort, and I was firmly requested to cease."

"I suppose, though, there is no law against your playing to me?" asked Vandyke, regarding

her with some interest, and recalling what French had said about her lonely life.

"You ought to know. I believe you're in that business."

"Very well, then. It is my professional opinion that you can begin at once."

"What are you going to charge me for it?"

"Oh — several pieces, probably."

She shook her head slowly and favored Vandyke with a wink which considerably surprised him.

"I can come right into your own field and beat you," she remarked. "I know more law than you do."

"How is that?"

"You've forgotten the S. P. C."

Vandyke smiled. "Which am I, child or animal?"

Miss Gaylord shrugged her shoulders. "It would be all one to you after I began. Thank you, but I don't play to people who are accustomed to hearing Miss Carruth. Isn't she the soul of music? It always seems as if she was part of the piano when she gets at it. Have you heard her sing yet?"

"No, not yet."

"Isn't it queer she doesn't like to? I have a lot of songs that she knows, and sometimes when she is here I play the accompaniment of one to tempt her. Once in a while she does come and

look over me and hum along a little : but she always has some excuse for not singing out."

"Yes, always," echoed Vandyke, as the girl waited. "So she comes here often, does she?" He looked about the room.

"No, not often. At least it does n't seem often to me, for I want her so much oftener; but she likes to come. That 's what I'm proud of. It is very odd." She glanced up at him thoughtfully, as if with a new light breaking in upon her. "Why, she is odd! I never looked at it so before, because everything in her life is so — so conventional, so cut and dried and marked out for her, and she is so gracious and dignified and self-possessed. She 's a lofty girl, that 's what I call her, but she *is* odd. When you think that she 'd like — or she thinks she 'd like to come out of her beautiful home and rough it in a little place like this, that 's odd. To be sure, you might say I left a nice home myself and did it of my own accord, but I'm only Althea Gaylord, wanting to get the best advantages; while she has had every advantage, and she is Margaret Caruth, right in the top of the swim, where everybody wants to be."

She paused, and her visitor nodded. His silence was not repressive, however. His interest and attention were evident.

"She 's done me a lot of good. Have you noticed I haven't said a slang word since you came in?"

Vandyke looked surprised.

"One may pop out at any minute. You just mention it if it does."

"Why certainly, Miss Gaylord, I'm — I'm sure" —

"Oh, you needn't feel embarrassed about it. It's a good deal of a bore to stop, but I'm doing it. Miss Magnet does n't like it."

Vandyke glanced up with a smile. "That is a very pretty name Mr. French has for Miss Caruth."

Althea nodded. "Speaking of her having an odd streak, of course the oddest thing of all is her refusal to sing, and do you know, I have a theory about that."

She looked so expectant that Vandyke responded: —

"Not a secret, I hope."

"No. It's a poor thing, but mine own. My theory is that she can't sing — anything to speak of."

The visitor did what was a rare thing with him. He laughed appreciatively. "I'm afraid that is a rather poor thing — that theory of yours, Miss Gaylord."

"Don't you be so sure! She went to London and studied."

"Yes?"

"She knew well enough that when she came back people would expect great things of her."

Has she ever sung since she came back? Hardly at all. Now, when I go home, I just dread it! Everybody will expect me to play a hundred times better than I can. Well, suppose I should look dignified and grave and refuse to play at all: do you suppose my friends would believe that it was because I was such a fine performer? Not much. They'd think it was a bluff, and that I was a failure."

"That is very amusing," remarked the guest: and indeed he seemed to find it so. "You think, then, that your Miss Magnet is only a hypocrite after all?"

"No, no! Don't use hard names! She's clever, that's what I mean: and goodness! we ought not to deny her a little recreation."

"I hope I shall see you when we do first hear her sing, Miss Gaylord."

"You believe she can do it?"

"I do."

"Why don't you make her, then?"

Vandyke raised his eyebrows. "I never heard that a bird who could sing and wouldn't sing *could* be made to sing."

"Mine could — my mocking-bird."

"How did you do it?"

"Gave him a meal-worm."

"Oh, he's prosy," thought Althea. "Mr. French would have laughed at that."

Vandyke, after a vague "H'm!" had grown

thoughtful. Miss Gaylord followed the direction of his eyes.

"You're looking at that box on the wall, aren't you? Everybody wonders what it means. It is for contributions to the poor children's fresh-air fund."

"And are callers allowed to contribute?" asked Vandyke, courteous and doubtful.

"It depends on how they talk."

He smiled questioningly. "Does my conversation — there's never very much of it — entitle me to the privilege?"

"Entitle you to the privilege! Listen to the gentleman! You'll have to come right down off that pedestal, my dear sir, if you want to be in that! That is a slang-box, Mr. Vandyke. Now, if you should tell me that you think I've been giving you a song and dance about Miss Magnet, you could give the poor babies a nickel."

"Well," rising, "I do emphatically think you have been giving me a song and dance about Miss Magnet. There!" A coin jingled into the box, and Althea giggled joyously. "Never let her know your precious theory, or our chances of hearing her will be slimmer than before. Good-night, Miss Gaylord." They shook hands. "Thank you for taking me in. I have enjoyed my call very much. May I come again?"

"There's the latch-string," remarked Althea, with an airy gesture toward the door.

When his step was no longer heard, she gave vent to her pent-up emotion in an astonishing *puts de soul*.

"Oh, I don't know," she sang, dancing back and forth before her mirror and nodding knowingly at her reflection. "I guess I'm in this too, Molly Darling!" She smiled at a sudden thought and paused in her pirouetting. "Just wait till I see Frenchy," she murmured.

She had n't long to wait, only until the next evening. Willard followed her from the dinner table into the parlor and seated himself beside her on the tête-à-tête seat where their confidential chats had usually been held. The parlor at Mrs. Barlow's was but little used by the boarders, and, except for occasional passing in and out of one and another, their talks were seldom disturbed.

"What have you been doing with yourself lately?" inquired French. "You seem to have been very busy evenings."

"I should hope I was busier than you, Gay Being!"

"But that doesn't answer me."

"Why, what do you suppose? Studying the dictionary, of course."

"The dictionary?"

"To enlarge my vocabulary."

"I dare say. Dictionaries by the Duchess."

"Don't you be funny now," remarked Althea warningly. "Your glass house is thin to gauziness."



"I don't have much time for light literature. That's a fact."

"I don't know what you call it then," retorted Miss Gaylord. "Your 'only books are woman's looks and'—far be it from me to say what they've taught you."

French met her eyes quizzically. "Go on," he said, "teach me some more."

She gave a brief, reluctant laugh. "As if I ever taught you folly! Here I give you the example of the little busy bee, week after week, and what good does it do? You're just as frivolous as ever! Oh," she added less severely, "I have n't been studying all the time. I occasionally relieve the tension by a little society. Observe my language, Mr. French."

"I sometimes feel, myself, that you ought to have more social whirl, as it were, but Mrs. Darling, to whom I suggested it, seems to be declining a lot of things herself lately. Caprice, thy name is Woman!"

"Not the name of that woman. Excuse me. M stands for Molly, but it also stands for the Method that is in some people's Madness. She might have whirled last night though, without losing anything."

"Why?"

"Because Mr. Vandyke was with me."

"Where?" asked French, surprised.

"Up in my room," replied Althea in a tone implying the utmost nonchalance.

"Vandyke called on you, and you took him up there?"

"He came up of his own accord. He evidently has n't your revised edition of the etiquette book."

"Good work!" commented French pleasantly.

Miss Gaylord knotted her brow protectingly. "Oblige me by not using low expressions, Mr. French. You ought to have heard him last night, though," she added gleefully, "talking slang to beat the band."

"Vandyke!"

Althea's frown reached Mrs. Barlow's ears in the dining-room. This was the expression of her companion's face that she had been waiting for.

"Well, you are a good teacher of folly, Miss Gaylord."

"No, no! Of colloquialisms only, my friend. I taught him one, just one: I don't believe he knew any before, and he said it and came up to the slang-box like a little man!"

"Is that the way you earn your money for the fund? If that is n't sharp practice!"

"Leave off the *d*, and you have it."

"Well, by Jove! you did wonders to get Vandyke to gambol!" French regarded her admiringly.

"But we were serious — oh, very serious, most of the time." Miss Gaylord's mouth grew small with sudden demureness. "And he will tell you that there are no man-traps and no brainstone in my room," she added mischievously.

"You have lots of fun with me, don't you?" said French.

The corners of the girl's twitching lips answered for her.

"It is time you were putting on that dress suit, is n't it?" she suggested. "The moths will be getting into it if you're not careful."

"No. Vandyke is coming to see me to-night."

Miss Gaylord regarded him. "I think you are mistaken."

"Oh, he left word with you?"

"No, but it was you he came to see last night."

"It was?"

"Yes. Of course I could n't bear to hear him knocking there in vain, and battling with the fury of the elements out in the hall; so, in common humanity, I asked him in."

"That was the way of it then? He misunderstood me as to the night."

"So much clear gain," suggested Althea. "You have an evening on your hands."

French looked up. "Will you invite me to call?"

"It strikes me you are calling."

"But — the ground is too neutral."

"The sort you like."

"Not now."

"Oh, Mr. Vandyke is your Christopher Columbus, is he?"

"Don't rub it in. Ask me up. I want to talk into your slang-box, too."

Miss Gaylord sat immovable. "You are distinctly not invited," she announced.

"And you talk about your humanity! I shall come in uninvited, then."

"Oh no, you won't."

"Yes. I shall sit here till you go, and then escort you. Vandyke has seen your music-room. Why should n't I?"

"Simply because it is my music-room, and I don't care to have you."

French smiled. "She must sulk her little sulk out, must she? Well," he looked at his watch, "what do you say to our going to the theatre? Would you like to?"

Miss Gaylord looked up eagerly. "Can a duck swim?" she responded.

"A nickel for the box," remarked French.

"Then don't take me by surprise. Is it time to get ready?"

"It was time ten minutes ago."

Althea fled.

## CHAPTER XI

### DOUBTS AND FEARS

THE New England spring had come with the penetrating damp chill that makes the cold of winter sink into insignificance. Vandyke, who had been spending a few days in Philadelphia, brought reports of budding trees and mild airs when he called on Miss Carruth.

"You have discovered Boston's cloven foot," she said.

"On the contrary, I was surprised to find how glad I was to get back."

Margaret could not meet the frank look with which he said it, but she did not acknowledge to herself that she had been waiting — waiting for him through all the time of his absence, and that for her now all was well.

"Since you went away, mother has perfected her plans for a concert for the benefit of our hospital, and she has asked me to help her. It is the only time she has asked me to sing since that afternoon at the mission long ago."

"And you have consented?"

"What else could I do?"

"Refuse."

"And what would you have said if I had refused?"

"I hope I should have had the discretion to say nothing."

"But you would have thought"

"That I had missed another chance of hearing you."

"You must have lost interest in the matter by this time. People who have to be urged to sing are tiresome."

"Perhaps I am not so eager for it as I was." Scarcely had the answer passed his lips than Vandyke felt disconcerted by his own bluntness. He looked anxiously at Margaret, and was relieved to perceive the calm little smile with which she regarded him.

"There are plenty of singers your mother could engage," he suggested.

"But she would rather save some hundreds of dollars for the hospital," said Margaret.

"I should think you would feel so out of practice, — so out of the way of it."

"You are afraid for me," said the girl.

"Yes, I am," he agreed honestly. "You might have a mortification in so public an affair."

"Thank you. You are a real friend. I am greatly surprised, though, that you offer me a loop-hole. I supposed you would say that my mother's wish should be law."

"But aren't you nervous about doing such a

thing? This is very different from singing in holes and corners for charity."

A low laugh escaped Margaret. "What a foolish egotist you must think me!" she said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Why, you must believe that I miscalculate my own powers."

"No, no, I don't. But a singer needs to practice, I suppose."

"When I cannot speak I shall know I cannot sing," replied Margaret. "Singing is more of spirit than of matter, and I practice a great deal — mutely."

"What a conviction yours is!" said Vandyke in amazement. "You dare to raise my expectations very high."

"I may not please you," returned the girl, unmoved. "I ought not to care. There will be individuals whom I do not reach."

Vandyke looked at her curiously and smiled. "I object to having you call me an individual. Then you are going to sing at this concert?"

Margaret bowed her head.

"Very well. I hope it will not bring you suffering in any form."

"Thank you," she answered, stifling the disappointment his attitude was to her. She knew now that she had been anticipating his unstinted approval and support.

He left her, himself vaguely discontented. A

little cloud seemed to have risen between them, and he could not resist an anxiety as to Margaret's success. He did not feel certain that the long period of brooding and repression upon this subject had not had its effect in unbalancing her judgment. What a catastrophe it would be, if shrewd Althea Gaylord's theory should be vindicated by reason of the long and obstinate silence Miss Carruth had maintained!

As the night for the concert approached, Vandyke's nervousness grew. He kept away from the Carruths', lest they should discover it, and thereby found to how great a degree the house on Beacon Street meant Boston to him.

He called on Mrs. Darling, and found the concert the uppermost thing in her mind also. It was to be an ultra-fashionable affair, and she was busy with details that did not interest Vandyke.

"Margaret?" she repeated, in answer to one of his remarks. "Oh, yes, she is going to sing. It seems it needed the stimulus of some great occasion to make her consider the effort worth her while."

"You have heard her, I suppose?"

"Of course, — dozens of times before she studied in London, but since she returned — let us see! Think what a rushing life we lead! I don't believe I have heard her once!"

"What is her voice? What is its range?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I don't pretend to



be musical. It is — I fancy it is a mezzo. Let us call it a mezzo. That sounds so delightfully vague."

"Is it" — Vandyke felt himself shrinking inwardly from the reply he might receive — "do you consider it a remarkable voice?"

Mrs. Darling knotted her brow in an effort to be fair and explicit. "Margaret has what I call a touching voice," she answered.

"Small, then?" Vandyke collapsed still further.

"No, oh no: I should n't say small. It is more than a year since I've been in the way of hearing her much, but I know she has often made me cry. Wait till you hear it," added Mrs. Darling, a little impatient of this interest; "then I should be glad to know your opinion."

With this small satisfaction Vandyke was forced to content himself, and although it was Sunday afternoon, and his hostess was piqued by his dis-trait excuses, he soon found himself on the street again, wandering aimlessly about, and looking at the mental picture which had for days been haunting him: Margaret Carruth on the stage before an audience of Boston's elect, critical at all times, but now doubly so that home talent had been selected to support the famous baritone engaged to electrify them. He saw the girl make a petty, amateurish success, heard her work politely applauded, patronized, damned with faint praise,

while possibly her own belief in her powers continued unimpaired, and in her infatuation she continued wrapped in dreams of the impossible.

Miss Gaylord might then triumph, but she would not: she was too warmly attached to Miss Carruth for that. Yes, Miss Gaylord in her way certainly appreciated Miss Carruth. He would go to see Miss Gaylord. The decision came to Vandyke suddenly, and altered his gait in an instant. Willard French too. He hadn't seen him since—since this responsibility, this nightmare, had come upon him. Later, perhaps, he would run in and see French; but just now he knew that he wanted Miss Gaylord and her whole-hearted prattle.

Arrived at the door in Newbury Street, the maid directed him to walk up to Althea's room. He declined, and firmly presented the bit of pasteboard, which the girl again ignored.

"Miss Gaylord has callers there now, and you can walk right up," she repeated.

So Vandyke, remembering the proximity of an ark of safety in the shape of French's apartment, complied with the invitation. As he approached, the sound of Miss Gaylord's laughter, mingled with a man's voice, came to his ears. He knocked at the door, which was ajar, and Althea opened it.

"How do you do, Mr. Vandyke? Yes, he is here," she said in welcome.

"I didn't come to see him, whoever he is. I came to see you."

"Why, how nice! Come in. Virtue is its own reward, for you will find Miss Carruth and Mr. French, both."

Yes. There sat Margaret, beautifully dressed, smilingly at ease, with no suggestion about her of the heroine of Vandyke's woeful day-dreams.

"I am teaching Miss Gaylord how to make the best tea you ever drank in your life," announced French, as the new-comer took off his overcoat, responding gladly to the geniality of the atmosphere.

"And I'll drink out of the mug," said Althea. "Miss Magnet, we didn't expect to become so popular, did we?"

"Mug! Tush, tush!" remarked French, busy over the kettle. "One of you go into my room and bring forth the best Royal Worcester."

"Let me," said Vandyke, with vague alacrity. "What did you say? Where?"

"I'll do it." Miss Carruth rose. "Willard's cups are sure to be dusty."

"Just because you won't marry me, Magnet!" groaned French.

"Perhaps I'm waiting to be asked," she answered as she left the room.

"Take this seat, Mr. Vandyke. This shoe-box is just the right height for me," said Althea. "We may be short on cups and chairs, but we have hospitality to — spare. It's awfully nice of you to come up."

Vandyke smiled his thanks at the speaker and then at Miss Caruth, who now entered, bearing a cup and saucer. Her graceful and decided movements pleased him, and he thought of their effectiveness on the occasion of the concert.

"It is very convenient to have a neighbor with swell table-furniture," said Althea, receiving the cup admiringly.

"I took the prettiest one he had," announced Margaret.

"Of course. There is nothing too good for a Philadelphia lawyer," added French.

"I'm thinking of drinking out of this myself," remarked Miss Gaylord.

Willard shook his head at her. "That isn't the way I have brought you up, little one," he reminded her gently. "Give the best to the company, always. Don't you remember?"

"Girls first and boys the biggest," smiled Althea. "That was the rule my mother used, to get around my brothers. It was the way she kept peace. Boys are such greedy animals. One of my cups is bigger than this."

"Rash girl!" said French. "Vandyke and I were boys once ourselves."

"Oh, there are plenty of things to remind us of that."

"You will excuse my ward, Vandyke. Her nerves are all on edge from the repression of the slang she brought with her from the wilds of Colo-

rado. I try not to be too hard on her. We've all had her trouble in some form. Now," — to Althea, — "watch me, my young friend. You don't want to be afraid to take off the lid of the tea-pot and stir the contents a little." French suited the action to the word.

"If that tea is as good as he thinks it is, shan't we enjoy it?" remarked Miss Carruth.

"I'm going to pour it," announced Althea hurriedly, as Willard lifted the pot. "It's my room, and I *will* pour the tea! You can pass it."

So she ensconced herself in triumph behind the table, and French, when all were served, subsided upon the shoe-box, and they had a cosy time.

"Now for music," said Vandyke contentedly, when the hot water was exhausted, and only one wafer remained for manners.

"Althea is going to play for us to-day," said Miss Carruth. "In her own room she can scarcely refuse."

"Then I should n't be like some people," said Miss Gaylord, with a little significant laugh.

"I don't refuse to play," said Margaret, smiling too; "and I believe you refuse to sing."

"Only because it makes my audience so sad," said Althea. "I'll sing when I want you to go home."

"Have you heard about the concert for St. Timothy's Hospital, Miss Gaylord?" Vandyke asked it.

"Indeed, I have. It is coming at last — that solo we've waited for so long."

She met Vandyke's earnest gaze and smiled, remembering their talk.

The smile made him restless. If she still believed what she had said, how could she smile at an impending tragedy?

She rose and went to the piano. "My mother cried to bring me up to play when I was asked. She used such a comforting argument. She always said, 'If they don't like it they'll never ask you again!' Now I'm going to play something, just to pave the way for Miss Magnet, and then we'll have a bang-up — I mean a real good time. I'm scared stiff, but no matter."

She played very carefully a song without words, and while her audience were saying pleasant things she pulled over a pile of music, and taking therefrom a song, began to play the accompaniment, smiling over at Miss Carruth.

"I heard that 'Israfel' was going to be one of your songs at the concert, so I've learned it," she said triumphantly. "Let us make her rehearse now."

"Now that we are quite by ourselves," said French coaxingly, advancing and offering his arm to Margaret. Vandyke said nothing. He almost dreaded her acceptance.

"The room is too small, Willard," she answered hastily.

“Oh! the caprices of a *prima donna*!” exclaimed French, straightening up.

Miss Carruth heard the hint of sarcasm. “It really is too small, Willard,” she said pleadingly.

“And your own music-room would be too large, I suppose.”

“If you will let me play to you I shall be glad to,” she said humbly.

She did play several times, and then a glance at her watch showed her that her carriage must be waiting. She made her adieux to Althea, and Vandyke immediately did likewise.

“If I can set you down anywhere, Mr. Vandyke, I shall be pleased,” she said as they reached the curb.

“Thank you. I should like to drive home with you.”

He followed her into the coupé and closed the door. Neither spoke until Newbury Street had been left behind. Then he looked at her, and saw that her eyes were suspiciously moist.

“These are exciting days for you,” he said hastily.

She answered with a careful self-possession which showed some self-conquest.

“I should like to believe that you at least understand that I am — am in training. I had good reason to decline to rehearse with Miss Gaylord this afternoon. I cannot explain — unless you understand.”

"I am ashamed not to understand, since you allow it. You are afraid of your own emotionality?"

She did not reply, but averted her eyes to the passing vehicles.

"You do mystify me," said Vandyke quietly; then letting his agitation appear, he hurried on. "I am anxious about the whole thing. I don't understand. What is it you intend to do? Is it possible you mean to face such an audience as that will be, without rehearsal?"

His tone had grown brusque. His companion looked around at him in surprise.

"By no means. The rehearsals will be all gone through with in due order. You do not believe in me, Mr. Vandyke. You are afraid for me. You perhaps think that I shall mortify my friends." Her tone grew cold. "By all means remain away from the concert. I shall not be hurt."

"Impossible! I must be there; but it means so much to me. It is such a great thing you undertake, such a test of any artist's abilities."

His excitement awoke an answering thrill in her. "It means so much to me!" The phrase would sound in her heart of hearts for days to come. She thought she understood at last, and rosy color stole over her cheeks, while her eyes grew soft, still gazing as before upon the passers-by.

At last she looked around at him. "I do comprehend the situation," she said gently. "I un-



derstand all its requirements. You need not fear for me. As soon as I promised to sing I began to work. I shall be ready."

When they stood before her house he refused to enter, but Mrs. Carruth, happening to be at a window, saw him stand with lifted hat and Margaret's hand in his for a long enough period to make her wonder what was passing between them. She retreated from the window before Margaret ran up the steps, and the great door of the house clanged after her.

A sound—a strange and unusual sound—greeted Mrs. Carruth's charmed ear.

"What!" she thought eagerly. "Can it be possible that Margaret is humming?"

"Where are you, mother?" called the girl.

"Here, dear, in the music-room."

The girl entered, her face beaming, and, with unwonted demonstrativeness, she threw her arms about Mrs. Carruth and kissed her. "I have had such a pleasant call at Althea's!"

"That is good. I saw that Mr. Vandyke came home with you. Why did n't you bring him in?"

"I don't know. Oh yes; he could n't. He has a business acquaintance in town whom he has to meet."

"Althea is so amusing!" added Margaret with a little laugh, as she flitted out of the room again.

"It is coming!" thought Mrs. Carruth; and she closed her eyes in mute thanksgiving.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CONCERT

ALTHEA GAYLORD, Willard French, and Burton Vandyke were guests in Mrs. Carruth's box on the evening of the concert. Their hostess, as she had warned them, had too many cares on her mind to settle into her place promptly. Miss Gaylord and French found Vandyke standing at the back of the box when they arrived.

As he greeted them he commented on the brilliancy of the already overflowing house.

"Why, of course," returned French. "When Mrs. Carruth undertakes a thing of this sort, it is a foreordained success."

As Althea seated herself, Vandyke leaned over her.

"How about your theory now, Miss Gaylord?"

"I don't know what to think!" replied the girl. "I know the sight of this great audience unnerves me. How did she dare? What will she do?" She gave an appealing look up into Vandyke's face and then turned further around until her eyes met French's. "Are n't you frightened for her?" she asked.

"For Magnet? No," he replied complacently.

"I never knew her to flunk in anything. If she should get a little stage fright I should think she had brought it on herself by her unaccountable hanging back this winter. How can she expect to be comfortable before the public if she won't sing in the bosom of her family?"

"But this is a very large undertaking," declared Vandyke. "How should Miss Carruth be expected to supplement an artist like Ramsay here in her own city?" He envied French his placidity. His own excitement rose from time to time in waves of painful feeling. "Do you really anticipate a success for her?"

"Of course," returned French calmly. "Magnet has one of the voices that go right in where people live, somehow. I've scarcely heard her since she came back: but if she sings as well as she did before she studied across the water, you'll see she will please the audience. She doesn't put on any frills and trills and things, but she gets there every time. I felt downright angry with her that afternoon up in Miss Gaylord's room. She will have to give some pretty good music to soothe this savage breast."

Here both men rose, for Mrs. Carruth, in a superb toilet, came up from the stage door and appeared at the back of the box.

The occupants of the boxes on either side of her kept her busy for a minute returning their greetings.

"Yes, that is Mrs. Carruth, the head of the whole affair," said one lady to a stranger guest. "She is a power, I tell you, when she undertakes to make anything a fashionable success. It is her daughter who is going to sing. I hear that the girl studied with Viviani, but she has been in Boston nearly all winter, and, so far as I can learn, no one has heard her sing a note. I can't learn that she has been heard at the smallest *soirée*; not even in her mother's house. It is the strangest thing I ever knew of. I should think Everett Ramfay's sensations would have been odd when he found his companion artist was to be an amateur. Think of the price of seats too; but it is Mrs. Carruth, so no one will complain. I'm glad they have the words printed on the programme. What is the first song Miss Carruth is going to sing? If it isn't 'O rest in the Lord!' What an odd selection; and did you ever hear of such daring! Think of her, merely a society girl, putting herself in comparison with the great singers of the world! And what is that other? 'Israfel!' I never heard of it. It seems to me it would have been more sensible to choose something people were familiar with," etc., etc.

While this harangue was bubbling forth, Vandyke had seated himself behind Mrs. Carruth. Mrs. Darling from her box opposite watched his fine head, thrown into relief by the ermine wrap toward which he leaned. She wanted that face

in proximity to her own tiara. She had been angry when she found her early invitation not early enough, and a little worm of envy gnawed in her now.

"He will come pretty soon," she comforted herself.

Vandyke noticed that his hostess was pale. That would be natural under such stress of labor as had been hers of late; yet the strained look might not proceed from that cause.

"Have you seen your daughter recently?" he asked, striving not to let his anxiety appear.

The smiles of greeting died from Mrs. Carruth's face, and she turned upon him gravely with a look of such foreboding that his heart hurried its beat.

"I have just left her. Mr. Vandyke, I have made a great, great mistake!"

"How could you do it!" he exclaimed with poignant reproach; then: "It is too late to ask it now. No," with another impetuous change, "it is not too late! Have her excused! Refund the money! Anything!"

Mrs. Carruth regarded him in surprise. "You thought I meant that Margaret was frightened? No, she is not afraid."

"You are, then!" ejaculated Vandyke in the same low tone, veiled by the applause that greeted the entrance of the orchestra and its celebrated leader. "It is the same thing. Stop it! Don't

let it go on! It is too much to ask — to expect.”

The lady regarded him wonderingly, but it was a smile of subdued gratification into which her look changed. “There is no fear of her failure. It is not that.” She longed to continue, to pour into the pale, speaking face her confidences, her fears. In that moment she loved this man who was to be her deliverer.

But her position constrained her. She must pay attention to the opening number. As soon as it closed, she turned again to Vandyke, who was waiting attentively, even while mechanically joining in the applause.

“I meant at first to make this a comparatively small affair, and I urged Margaret to help me. It has grown into these proportions almost without my realization. Only now when I went into her dressing-room — and saw her — I realized! I had put before her the very thing I dreaded. I wonder if you know — her wishes” —

“Yes, I know.” The eloquent brown eyes gave back gloom for gloom.

“And you agree with me?” The question was an appeal.

“I do. I do agree with you,” he said acutely. “Would that you had not drawn her into this thing!” The impassioned manner and stilled tone drove the red to Mrs. Carruth’s pale cheeks.

She regarded him gravely, significantly, for a

silent instant. "With you to help me, it shall be the last time," she said slowly.

He nodded, too tense with apprehension and excitement for this present occasion to have regard to a future.

A famous violinist was bowing to the greeting of the house. The orchestra accompanied his florid performance, and when it was over Vandyke waited in torture for the hand-clapping to cease.

It seemed to him amid that sea of faces that he was alone. Margaret Carruth was to come next on the programme with the great, simple aria so unsuited to the powers of the average singer: and even her mother's face showed that she was momentarily absorbed in the work of the artist who had just ceased.

He felt the perspiration at the roots of his hair. Such sensations he had known once before when as a boy in the dentist's office he had awaited the appearance of the forceps.

Would these fools insist upon an encore and prolong his agony? Yes, yes! Encore the man. It would give ten minutes' grace. In the mean time the building might take fire, or Margaret might faint. He joined frantically in the effort of the violin enthusiasts, and who knows but that it was this infusion of vigor into the applause that won the boon?

At all events, the violinist played again. Probably it was very wonderful. He did his work

quite alone this time, and the members of the orchestra tapped on their stands with their bows when he finished, and looked interested.

Vandyke sank back in his chair and lung his thumbs in his pockets, for his cold hands exasperated him by their un-readiness. His tongue felt dry when the house grew still. Mrs. Carruth turned and gave him a look of resignation, to which he made no response.

A breaking out of applause again galvanized him. French and Miss Gaylord were clapping eagerly, and smiling. Vandyke raised himself slowly and looked at the stage. Margaret was already standing before the footlights, bowing her acknowledgment of a generous greeting.

After the one inclination of the head she stood immobile in her white gown, such unconscious dignity and ease in her bearing, that again the blood rushed to Vandyke's forehead and beat in his ears as the orchestra began to play. Memories flitted through his mind: of the girl's first confidences to him under the idol's blind smile, of her repeated and pained refusals to grant her friends' requests, of her assurance and her endurance.

Now the time had come. She stood ready to give the message with which her full heart pulsed, and one, knowing her as he did, read it in the uplifted look on her calm brow, the subtle smile on her grave lips. As he watched, his fear passed. He did not reason, but he felt the adequacy ex-



pressed in the fine presence, the serene attitude ; he waited, spell-bound, — he knew not for what.

He felt a sob disturb the ermine beside him. Mrs. Carruth turned from Margaret's face and met his eyes with a strange gaze.

“ And rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race,” she murmured.

Then the singer's lips parted, and she sang : —

“ O rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him,  
And He shall give thee thy heart's desire.”

The roundness, the clearness, the tenderness and conviction, the strength of that promise ! How it reached and clave to the soul of every listener in that hushed assemblage !

Curiosity, tolerance, leniency, were all forgotten. Was the voice large or small, who knew ? It touched the vulnerable spot in every heart and called each one higher.

“ Commit thy way unto Him, and trust in Him.”

Women's hands sought each other, husbands' eyes sought wives', and wives' husbands'. Molly Darling forgot the dark head leaning over the ermined chair opposite, and her breath came softly between parted lips, as she listened.

Was it Margaret Carruth who was doing this ? A girl many of them knew and often greeted ? That voice, disembodied of obstacle or difficulty, which floated with a heavenly message to heights and depths, did it proceed from an angel who had been entertained among them unawares ?

When the singer ceased the hush was not broken for seconds. At last some one threw off the spell. Applause began, rippled, broke, thundered.

Mrs. Carruth and Vandyke held themselves quiet and motionless, while French, clearing his throat, and Athena, heedless of tears that ran down her cheeks, added to the acclaim.

French gazed across at Mrs. Carruth and Vandyke, full of excitement. Catching the lady's eye, he leaned across.

"Who would have believed it, Mrs. Carruth, eh?" he ejaculated, continuing to clap. "The magnet works, eh?" Then, unable to contain his exuberance and irritated by Vandyke's passivity: "That is n't mere singing, Vandyke, eh? Wake up, man! What's the matter with you, eh?"

The woman in the next box who had commented disapprovingly early in the evening was biting her lip and ruining her gloves.

Mrs. Darling was saying very gently to her husband: "Can you see well where you are, dear? Wouldn't it be better if you moved your chair this way further?"

Willard French was still deliriously murmuring: "Have her out, have her out!" and applauding madly, although already Margaret had three times come forward and bowed her acknowledgments.

"Be quiet, French," said Vandyke pensively,

pulling Willard down into his chair. "She won't sing an encore to that."

"How are *you* so well informed?"

"I don't know," answered Vandyke. He felt too relaxed to argue. But he was right.

"It must have been some magnetic condition of the house," said the woman in the next box to her friend when she could be heard. She was interested in psychological research. "I suppose such a concourse of friends, all moved by good feeling, must have created an atmosphere, an ether, in which the girl sang above herself, as it were. It seemed to me part of the time that I didn't breathe. It was very peculiar. I don't suppose it would be possible for her to do it again. If she were clever, she'd fall ill right now and go home."

"Are n't you going behind to congratulate her, Mrs. Carruth?" asked French.

The lady merely shook her head, and Willard was obliged to contain himself, although it seemed to him that some one with the right to hug Margaret should seek her without delay and perform that office.

The English baritone took his turn, the other numbers came along in order, until Margaret appeared for the second time. Then the spontaneous greeting broke out with eager enthusiasm.

Vandyke leaned forward in his chair and fastened his eyes upon the girl. She was apparently looking at some lofty point directly before her,

but slowly her head turned and she glanced, her expression unchanged, at her mother's box, and met his look. For a second, her eyelids fell: then, as before, with the effect of expressing with ardent sincerity her own feeling, Poe's pathetic poem began to roll with sustained fervor from her lips.

"In Heaven a spirit doth dwell  
Whose heart-strings are a lute;  
None sing so wildly well  
As the angel Israfel,  
And the giddy stars, so legends tell,  
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell  
Of his voice, all mute,

"And they say, the starry choir  
And the other listening things,  
That Israfel's fire  
Is owing to that lyre  
With the trembling living wire  
By which he sits and sings."

Her voice rang out at the climax with an appeal. The sobs that rose insistently in Mrs. Carruth's breast threatened to overwhelm her. It seemed as if all that she had known the girl to be suppressing, now broke forth in passionate, pathetic wistfulness.

"If I could dwell  
Where Israfel hath dwelt,  
And he where I,  
He might not sing so wildly well  
A mortal melody,  
While a bolder note than this might swell  
From out my lyre within the sky!"

Whatever the power that attached to the young

singer, the thrill of her voice ran like an electric chain about her audience. The applause was exciting in volume and eagerness.

Mrs. Carruth bit her lip painfully. The woman in the next box tried to conceal that she was crying until she found that the majority of her friends were too occupied to heed her.

This time Margaret was not to be excused; nor did she wish to be. After two recalls she appeared with her accompanist: no longer with the exalted expression in her face. Only a happy girl, pleased under splendid approbation, stood before the foot-lights smiling toward her mother's box while the prelude to her song was touched.

She gave that daintiest of love-songs, "At Parting," with sweet sincerity; warming to intensity and dying at last in pensive yearning sadness, with every phrase swaying her hearers as she would:—

"The sweetest flower that grows  
I give you as we part,  
You think 't is but a rose;  
Ah me! It is my heart!"

"Long live Magnet! Long live Magnet!" cried French into the volley of applause that went from audience to stage like a direct message of loving thanks and praise.

"Passable, was n't it, eh?" he said to Vandyke when finally they rose to leave.

The latter's eyes were glowing.

"I should like you to go with me to get Margaret," said Mrs. Carruth. "If we hurry a little, we can escape people. You will excuse us, Miss Gaylord and Willard?"

"I don't know. We want to come too," said French.

"Not to-night, dear boy. It has been so exciting," Mrs. Carruth's cloak was not whiter than her cheeks.

"That woman is going to feel the reaction from this," said Willard to Althea. "By Jove, she's a worker!"

"How now, Miss Gaylord?" Vandyke asked it softly as he followed Mrs. Carruth.

"Oh, there's nothing left of me, and I only brought one handkerchief," responded Althea recklessly. "Think of our expecting her to sing 'Israel' in that seven by nine box of mine!"

Mrs. Carruth and Vandyke hastened toward the stage door by a corridor at the back of the boxes, the lady evading sundry attempts to detain and congratulate her.

They found Margaret surrounded by a bevy of musicians, calm, but with a light in her eyes and a look in her face that one might wear who, after long yearning, breathes her native air at last.

"She belongs to us, Mrs. Carruth," said Everett Ramsay. "London has a place for your daughter."

"You don't know what a large place she fills

here," replied the mother, and Margaret noted her pallor even while she gave her hand to Vandyke, disengaging herself from the group to do so.

He pressed it in silence.

"You see?" she said, interrogating him with her glance.

"It is a turning-point in your life," he answered. "A memorable night. I shall never forget it."

Her heart swelled. The homage of his eyes intoxicated her. It was a climax to all that had gone before. Impulsively she separated a rosebud from the flowers she carried and gave it to him.

"Your sympathy means much to me," she said.

He took the flower mechanically, his eyes riveted on her radiant ones. In that moment he saw her gain and his loss. He knew for the first time that for him her hand held the gift of the whole world and heaven beyond, while of all the treasure naught could come to him but this one warm rosebud, dropped from unattainable, cloudy heights.

The English singer observed the scene.

"Perhaps the chief obstacle to our getting Miss Carruth stands there," he remarked pleasantly to Margaret's mother. "'You think 't is but a rose' — the song says."

"I am quite sure it is only a rose, Mr. Ramsay," returned Mrs. Carruth. "Good-night."

She took Margaret away as quickly as she could.

They scarcely spoke while the carriage swiftly rolled homeward: but arrived at the house, she led the girl into her own room and drew her down upon a divan, where they held each other in a long silent embrace.

"Now you are going right to bed, little mother," said Margaret at last. "You are very tired. I hope St. Timothy's has n't cost you too dear."

"I hope not, Margaret. I hope not." As she said it, Mrs. Carruth regarded the girl fixedly. "Do you think I could sleep until we have — talked it out?"

"To-morrow will do," said Margaret lightly. "I'm sleepy."

"Margaret Carruth, look at me. Tell me the truth. Are you really sleepy? Shall you sleep to-night?"

"Most certainly." The girl smiled. "Why not?"

"After all the excitement, the flattery — that ovation — are you sleepy?" incredulously.

Margaret looked at her strangely. "Mother, if a famished man is fed, can he sleep? If one who has pined in foreign lands reaches home at last, can he sleep? If the mother who has lost her child clasps him again in her arms, can she sleep?"

"Margaret — child — what are you going to do?" There was a despairing ring in the voice.

"Nothing, to-night."



“To-morrow, what?”

“We will talk things over, perhaps.”

Mrs. Carruth shook her head at the vague lightness.

“Now — now is the time,” she said firmly.

The girl waited a minute and a new seriousness grew in her face. “It is true then,” she said at last, “to-night has convinced you of my vocation.”

“No, no,” impetuously. “It has convinced me that you have a power, but you can wield it without — without” — her voice died away.

“Mother, listen. To-night, soon after my first song, a woman came to me, — a woman we both know. She was profoundly agitated. She said that song had changed her whole life. To-morrow she had intended to leave her home and children, to give all up for a love that had come to her too late. She is a miserable woman, but she decided during that song not to go, not to seek happiness in this world. She wanted me to know, so she made them let her in, found me alone, and told me. Since you urge me to speak to-night, I appeal to you not to oppose me any longer!” The girl’s voice thrilled her listener; but Mrs. Carruth nerved herself, and her reply was ready.

“Yes, you have a great power. You can and will use it for good wherever you are; but, Margaret, is there no one in the world but me whom you have to consider?”

The girl looked surprised, reflective, and a slow

blush rose to her face. "No one," she said at last.

"Then there may be. Mr. Vandyke told me to-night that he agreed with me: that he did not approve of your taking up a professional life."

Margaret looked up. "Are you sure," she asked, "quite sure you did not misunderstand him?"

"Yes." Mrs. Carruth paused, and in the hush decided that she must tell all the truth. "It was before you sang," she added reluctantly.

"Ah!" the girl gave a nod.

"But, my child, wait. The chances for domestic happiness are so small for a woman situated as you would be. He doesn't realize it, perhaps. Then you must remember it—for his sake."

Margaret's lips parted, and she seemed entranced for an instant: then she threw off the silent spell. "That has not to be considered," she said breathlessly. "Let us confine the question to ourselves. Tell me, do you still think, with such indications as I have had to-night, that my duty is to obey you blindly?"

"O Margaret, don't speak so, dear!" The girl had risen in her agitation, and Mrs. Carruth's rich wrap fell and trailed on the floor as she turned to follow her with troubled eyes.

"Hasn't it been more love than duty that has coerced you, Margaret? Let us compromise," she added, as the girl did not at once answer.

"Spring is here. Let us see what the summer will bring forth. Supposing, my child, that your happiness and mine is coming to us after all, traveling along the same path?"

She rose and gave the girl a brilliant, significant smile that the latter could not face. To escape it Margaret glided to her side and buried her face in her mother's neck.

Mrs. Carruth's eyes grew triumphant as she stood patting the white shoulder and looking through the dissolving walls of the chamber into a bright futurity.

## CHAPTER XIII

### VACATION

A LONG business trip claimed Burton Vandyke immediately after the concert for St. Timothy's, so he did not hear the buzz of the nine days' wonder over Margaret's success, although he could picture it.

"The child takes it with wonderful self-poise," Mrs. Carruth wrote to Miss Beebe. "She is quite gentle and composed when people swoop upon her with flattery. It appears to be as unexciting to her as if they said, 'Why, Margaret Carruth, your eyes are gray!' She seems to be answering them: 'Yes, didn't you know before that they were gray?'"

"Mr. Vandyke is not offering incense with the rest because he has been called away from town. He is likely to be gone some time; but I believe the prospect is good for the outcome of which I spoke to you,—that is, so far as he is concerned. His excitement on the evening of the concert could mean only one thing, and he was the trump card which I played in the inevitably painful interview dear Margaret and I had afterward. Of course, I could deal only in hints, but they seemed

to have an effect. Mr. Vandyke and Margaret are both the sort of young people who would approach such a step with care and thought. What a turning-point the coming summer will be in our lives! What hopes I am hanging upon it! We shall go to the cottage as early as possible this season. Margaret is anxious about me; and indeed the winter has been more of a strain than she knows. It is a dolefully white face I see when I look in the glass: but our hero, our Sir Launcelot, will espouse my cause and deliver me! I don't dread to tell him that which you know of. He is so broad in his views, so strong and gentle, he will guard Margaret as I should. Oh, Luella, what happy days may be coming to me! My spirit sings when I think of the relief and peace that is perhaps in store.

"We shall count on a visit from you, any part of the season which suits you. There is always plenty of room at Cliff Nest."

The Carruths went in June to the eyrie among the rocks where the sea beat far below on a pebbly beach. Groves of fragrant firs embowered the cottage at the back, rooting in a boulder-strewn soil and sending forth their wholesome breath on every breeze.

The people who are always ready to invest the money of rich folk for them disapproved somewhat of Cliff Nest. It was too remote from pleasant society for Margaret, they said. Of course Mrs.

Carruth, after her laborious winter, enjoyed the reaction of absolute quiet : but for her daughter's sake she ought to have built a place nearer to the fashionable resort ten miles away. Mrs. Darling agreed with these philanthropic souls. She liked to keep one hand on the Carruths even while she engaged in the pursuit of congenial pleasures. Their relationship, their countenance, meant a great deal to her. It bored her to have to take a long drive whenever she wished to survey their movements and know what persons composed their occasional house-parties. Sometimes she wished she did not own a cottage of her own. In that case she would be sure of invitations for long stays at Cliff Nest, and the rest of the time she could board at the great hotel in the heart of the resort above mentioned.

Mrs. Carruth's treatment of her was always courteous without familiarity, and the pretty woman resented a politeness which never warmed to forgetfulness of the conventions : but Mrs. Carruth was generosity and hospitality incarnate. Mrs. Darling knew that horses and carriages, boats and bath-houses would be at her disposal as long as she might be Cliff Nest's guest.

However, this season she was glad of her cottage, glad, too, of the miles that divided it from the Carruths. She laid elaborate plans to meet Burton Vandyke on his return from the West before he had been to Beacon Street : and when

she finally saw him seated in her little drawing-room, and made certain that this was the first call he had made since his return, she smiled with the triumphant certainty that her point was gained.

"Your trip has been a hard one, Mr. Vandyke," she said with a wise nod.

"I'm sorry I show it," he replied: "but it has been a fight from beginning to end."

"I dare say when my note was handed you, you sighed to yourself that you wished no one would hurry you into any social duties, even into such a tiny and informal one as a call on me."

"No, indeed. It seems a long time since I have seen my Boston friends." Vandyke looked up. "I left town at a very exciting moment to Miss Carruth."

"So you did: and it shows how long you have been gone, that to-day there is almost a feeling of summer in the air."

The visitor was not to be lured away from his subject. "How is Miss Carruth? Did she suffer from the reaction from all that excitement?"

"She is quite well. I hear she is going into singing as a profession. I hear that Everett Ramsay encourages her to come to London. She told me once a good while ago that she thought the life of a singer very enviable. I charged her with this a few days ago and she evaded me. She evidently isn't ready to talk, but I prophesy that is just what she will do. Her success certainly gives her

every reason. So " -- Mrs. Darling made an airy gesture -- "vanish Miss Carruth from Boston society."

Her companion's eyes were looking far away.

"At all events, just now she is not so much in need of attention as you are," she added. "You do look almost haggard. As your care-taker I must insist on knowing what you are planning for a vacation."

"I'm afraid I mustn't think much about that, Mrs. Darling."

"Indeed you must!" in indignant protest. "Of course you are going to have a vacation."

"Perhaps -- very likely, two weeks."

"A beggarly two weeks!"

"A princely two weeks I shall call it, if I get it."

"Very well, we will assume that you will get it. The principal thing for which I sent for you is to ask you to spend those weeks with us."

"Why, Mrs. Darling, I thank you"

"Oh, but there can't be any 'buts.' Remember, I am one of your oldest friends in Boston."

"And kindest," added Vandyke. "I have friends, though, who ante-date Boston, who would expect me to come to them if circumstances favor."

"But they may not? That is good," returned Mrs. Darling gayly. "Well, all I ask is that such time as you spend with Boston friends you give to us." She assumed a serious air. "This may



seem insistent to you, Mr. Vandyke, but it is in behalf of my husband that I urge it. Henry's vacation will do him so much more good if he has you with him. I'm sure the hammocks and breezes and sails at Spindrift will rest you wonderfully. You must come and try them. Henry ridicules me, and says there is no such word as Spindrift; but who in her senses would call a cottage by such an ugly name as Spoon-drift? Not I, at any rate. The house is too pretty to be treated so. Come and see if it is n't."

"I surely will, Mrs. Darling, if it is a possible thing," returned Vandyke. "Mr. Darling and I will have to find out if we can agree upon dates."

"And the trouble is he meant it," laughed his hostess to herself after he had gone. However much Vandyke's literalness might appeal to her sense of humor as well as pique her vanity, she was elated at her success. Cliff Nest could not receive him now. He had given his word.

Margaret had in the winter often shown Althea Gaylord pictures of their seashore home, and expressed the hope that she would not return West without visiting them there. A hint was enough for Althea, who wrote at once to her parents for permission to extend her stay in order to view the beauties of the Atlantic coast, although she avowed honestly that she would be willing to be enveloped in a fog all summer if within the wet blanket she could be side by side with Margaret Carruth.

Mr. and Mrs. Gaylord gave their consent, so that the pleasure of anticipation cheered Althea all through the days of late spring, when her face looked pale and small as she kept firmly at her work under a sun-beaten roof.

"You are as big-eyed as a robin," Willard French said to her. "It is time you sent your piano away."

"Never say die," returned Miss Gaylord.

"Actions speak louder than words," remarked French. "Better say it than do it, it seems to me."

"Don't you order your mourning yet. Do you think I'd shuffle off before I've been to Cliff Nest? Think of going to bed and getting up and eating three meals a day in the same house with Miss Magnet!"

"That's the thing," said French approvingly. "Such meals as you will eat at Cliff Nest, too! I've tried them."

"Are you going down this summer?" asked the girl. The question had risen to her lips on many previous occasions, but for some reason it had not been easy to put.

"I shall spend my vacation at Crest View, yes."

"Whose house is that?"

"It isn't a house; it is a village, the resort nearest to Cliff Nest. Mrs. Darling's cottage is only a little way out from it."

"Is that why you choose it?" asked Althea impulsively.

"One reason, yes."

The girl pursed her lips reflectively.

"I saw Mrs. Darling yesterday. She told me that Mr. Vandyke has come back, and that he is going to spend his vacation with her," she said slowly.

"He 'll have a picnic," commented French placidly. "Spindrift is a gay place."

"She always gets her way, that woman," remarked Althea; "that is, nearly always. If she does n't — zip! Look out for hysterics and a general letting go of everything. I pity the person who incurs her wrath then! As a rule, though, she gets her way."

"Of course. Pretty women ought to," returned French provokingly.

"Thank you." Miss Gaylord swept him a curtsy. "I'm glad you admire big-eyed robins. I have my way exactly. If you men prefer to swing on Mrs. Darling's gate to coming to Cliff Nest, I shall have Miss Magnet all the more to myself. I wish you a very happy summer, Mr. French. I know just your style: hopping at a fashionable hotel, and playing Bunthorne to twenty love-sick maidens with fifty summer toilets apiece. Go on. Do it, by all means."

"Thank you, Miss Gaylord," returned French feelingly. "I could n't have gone into it with any zest, wanting your permission. As it is, my heart will be as light as my heels."

"And your head," added Althea quickly, as she left the room.

Willard smiled pensively at the door, which was quivering with the energy expended by Miss Gaylord upon closing it.

"It seems," he mused, "that the mention of Mrs. Darling gets on to my ward's nerves."

Meanwhile Vandyke called at the Carruths'. Margaret was out; but Mrs. Carruth greeted him with hearty cordiality and commented, as Mrs. Darling had done, on the evidences of fatigue that he bore.

By a natural transition she too came at the subject of his vacation, and he replied, as he had to his other hostess, that it was problematical.

"But that won't do," said Mrs. Carruth kindly. "Brainworkers must stop and renew themselves."

"I hope for a chance," he answered. "You certainly need a change yourself, Mrs. Carruth."

She smiled. "It isn't the pot calling the kettle black exactly, is it? We're both too white for that. Yes, I need it, and Cliff Nest will give it me. I wish we might see you at our summer home, Mr. Vandyke. A fortnight there would make you feel re-created."

He looked at her, a certain glow of response in his eyes that she had come to know well. "I can think of nothing in the world that would give me so much pleasure," he answered with a sincerity that elated her.

“Then you will come?”

“I don’t know that I shall have any vacation,” he answered, his face impassive again, “but if I do I shall have to — I shall spend part of it with my people. For the rest, I have already promised Mrs. Darling.”

“When did you promise Mrs. Darling? You only arrived yesterday.” Mrs. Carruth spoke quickly, off her guard for once. Was this man not as good as a son, better than a son, to her?

“She sent for me to come to see her,” he replied, “and the conversation turning on the summer, she happened to ask me.”

“Happened to ask him!” thought Mrs. Carruth hotly. “She has probably been having the railway stations watched!”

But her manner as she answered him was as calm as ever. “Spindrift is a pleasant house, and not so far from us. We shall hope to see something of you.”

“Mrs. Darling told me great news of — of your daughter. I don’t know that you care to speak of it, but is she to — you have yielded to her wish?” He asked it modestly and with hesitation, ready to abandon the subject at a hint.

Mrs. Carruth smiled at him. “That matter is suspended for the summer, Mr. Vandyke. I am glad you spoke of it, for if I can secure you for an ally in the matter I shall be very glad. I want you to understand my position.”

She did indeed; and her executive ability was so great, her power to bring about each thing that she considered desirable had been so long unquestioned, she had now to struggle with the temptation this tete-a-tete was to her.

She longed to say: "I approve of you. Your financial circumstances, whatever they may be, are a matter of indifference to me. I believe you can win my daughter. It will please me to have you try."

But instead, she continued without excitement: "Margaret is the light of my life. If she adopts the profession she thinks she wishes, I must either live on here alone, or I must break up this home and relinquish the work which I do here, and go about with her. If I believed that would bring her the greatest happiness, it would be my duty to agree to one of those propositions; but I do not. The only real, solid, safe happiness in this world for a woman is to be a wife and mother. Of course it fails at times, but more often it succeeds. That is the life I could give Margaret up to. Tell me, Mr. Vandyke, do you agree with me?"

He was silent, his gaze fixed on the floor. Would he speak to her now? Would he ask her? Was he trying to summon courage? Ah, how could she give it to him and yet make no mistake!

"I was surprised," she went on, after an instant's pause, "to find that Margaret had talked to

you on this subject. It was a great mark of confidence. She is one of the most reserved girls imaginable. It is this that makes me know that you can influence her; that makes me wish for your assurance that at least you understand my position and believe me sincere."

"I do believe that," said Vandyke, rising. He was an imposing man standing thus, his pale face, dignified to coldness, regarding his hostess without a smile. Something in his look disconcerted her. It did not accord with a humility which needed encouragement. "I trust the summer may solve your problem, Mrs. Carruth," he added, "and I hope it will be very enjoyable and beneficial to you both. Please present my regrets to your daughter that I have missed her. If I succeed in getting to the seashore, I shall remember your permission to call."

In another minute he was gone, and his hostess, dismayed, was questioning space with wondering eyes. Offense followed her first surprise at his abruptness. "Yet how haggard he looked as he stood there! Perhaps he felt suddenly ill. It must have been so."

She recalled each word of their brief conversation uneasily, as if laying it before Margaret's maiden vision. She longed to have him come again and find the girl at home, for of course he would come in the fortnight that must intervene before their flitting. His parting words had

sounded absurdly like a farewell: but they could not have meant that.

Had she asked him to come again? She could not recall. She had been too excited, too embarrassed to know. Had anything offended him? What could have caused his strange, unsympathetic behavior?

When Mrs. Carruth, carefully concealing any agitation, announced to Margaret that Vandyke had called, the girl expressed only conventional regret at missing him: but she looked for him every evening for a week thereafter in vain.

At the end of that time a telegram arrived announcing the death of old Mr. Beebe, and the Carruths went to Springdale to the funeral, taking Althea with them.

Upon their return Mrs. Carruth eagerly examined the cards that had been left, to discover if Vandyke's was among them. It was not.

At last the evening before their departure arrived. Mrs. Carruth had been longing, yet fearing to speak of Vandyke to her daughter, and now she could hold her peace no longer.

"I begin to fear that Mr. Vandyke is ill," she said. "He looked so badly the evening he called."

"Bad news travels fast," replied Margaret. "Willard would know, I think. When he was here last night he mentioned Mr. Vandyke casually."



Mrs. Carruth regarded the speaker with a mixture of relief and disappointment. Margaret seemed entirely undisturbed.

“ Well — what do you think of his behavior then ? ” she asked.

“ We have no reason to think anything of it,” was the reply. “ I have hoped ” — she added after a minute, “ I have wondered if you said anything the evening he was here that — that ” —

“ That what, Margaret ? ”

The girl came close to her mother and put her arms around her tenderly.

“ That you regret now,” she said slowly. “ You know, little mother, your rule, ‘ Where there ’s a will there ’s a way,’ might tempt you now.”

“ No indeed, indeed, Margaret.” Mrs. Carruth colored painfully. “ I was tempted. Of course I was, but — I remembered you ! ”

“ That is good, mother,” said the girl quietly.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CLIFF NEST

THIN and pale Miss Gaylord might be, but there was no girl in Boston fuller of anticipation than she when on the following morning she drove with the Carruths to the railway station. Upon their arrival Willard French appeared to open the carriage-door, and Althea was pale no longer in her surprise at the apparition. She had bade him good-by already, and not the least of her anticipations of Cliff Nest was that she would learn there not to listen for his step, nor when she walked abroad to watch for the particular style of hat which Mr. French affected.

Now here he was again and the parting must be repeated.

"This day is going to be a scorcher," he remarked. "You go at precisely the right moment."

He took possession of their bags and escorted the three ladies to their train and saw them established in their chairs.

"Take me with you, Mrs. Carruth," he suggested, as he stood in the aisle, fanning himself

with his hat. "Somehow I don't yearn to go back to the office."

"I'm sure you're never any trouble, my dear boy," remarked Mrs. Carruth. "You are very welcome to come. Remember, we speak for at least a part of your vacation."

"Be sure I shan't forget any such pleasure. I have some magazines and things here." He handed some periodicals and a box of candy to Margaret, and then from inside his coat brought forth a little package loosely wrapped in tissue paper.

"These are for my ward," he said gravely. "I'm afraid I've jammed them now."

They were violets like those that had once made peace between French and herself, and Althea looked her pleasure as she took them.

"I think you will find that Miss Gaylord does me credit, Mrs. Carruth," he went on. "If you tire of her, just return her to Newbury Street. There is going to be an aching void where the piano has stood all winter."

"That is it," thought Althea, burying her nose in the violets. "I have never been anything more to him than a good joke."

"Never mind these empty flatteries, Mr. French," she remarked in her airiest drawl. "Your heavy responsibility is shifted, and now there is nothing to worry you but my teacups. Don't you let anything happen to them, and don't

you let anybody drink out of them, unless it is Mr. Vandyke. Remember, now!"

"Oh, I saw Vandyke last night," said Willard, turning to Margaret. "He didn't know till then that you were going so soon. It's about a minute now, so good-by, all of you." French shook hands with Mrs. Carruth, with Margaret, then with Althea.

"Good-by, little busy bee," he said smiling.

"Good-by, big butterfly."

He pressed her hand and returned her look so keenly that she could almost believe he was sorry to see her go.

"Don't work too hard," she added in a different tone.

"What advice to a butterfly!" he laughed, and with a parting nod passed down the aisle and disappeared.

As French left the car by one door, a tall man in a gray summer suit entered it at the opposite end. The thin material of his clothing clung lightly to the muscles of his splendid figure, and many eyes turned toward him as the train started. His roving glance almost instantly caught sight of our group, and lifting his hat he strode forward.

"But we've started!" exclaimed Margaret, rising involuntarily. He ignored Mrs. Carruth and Althea as he laid a florist's box in her hands.

"I've been out of town again," he explained, with no brightening of his sombre face.

"Please get off!" she ejaculated. She had not seen him since that evening in the green-room. What had happened to change him so!

"It has been impossible for me" —

"Yes, yes! Please get off!"

Her hand was in his.

"Go, *please!*" she repeated. "Good-by — no, au revoir!"

With another vague lifting of his hat and a look at no face but hers, he disappeared.

"Oh, we're going so fast!" exclaimed Margaret apprehensively, turning to Althea, who looked big-eyed and sympathetic for an instant as both girls craned their necks at the window.

"I did n't see any great, elegant, gray person prostrate, did you?" asked Althea at last, doubtfully.

"No," agreed Margaret, her arrested breath coming again.

Then Miss Gaylord after an instant gave way to an irrepressible burst of laughter, her eyes growing moist in the effort to refrain, for she was n't at all sure that Miss Carruth would like her hilarity. Margaret looked interrogative.

"I never saw such a funny interview in my life," said Althea, turning half apologetically to Mrs. Carruth, who was sitting up straight in her chair, her eyes thoughtful. "All Miss Margaret said was, 'Get off; do get off; please go;' and he giving her flowers and making eyes at her, and

— and — everything ! ” She yielded to renewed merriment, with more courage, for her companions smiled too, Margaret blushing and wishing her mother would not watch her so.

Perhaps Mrs. Carruth felt this, for she leaned back in her chair again and swung half around toward the window away from the happy girls. Neither of them ever forgot that ride down to Cliff Nest. Each felt that a chapter in her life had been closed with — just at the end — unexpected satisfaction. The page headed, “ To be continued,” neither of them looked at, but each read over her chapter again and again with flights of happy thoughts concealed, whose influence betrayed itself only in the geniality of their intercourse.

Margaret opened her box of American Beauties and asked Athena to pass one to her mother. Mrs. Carruth received it, and touching it to her lips, waved it toward the giver without lifting her head from its sleepy pose against the back of the chair ; but she was not sleepy : she was never wider awake. Never had she been gladder to be ignored than a few minutes ago by Vandyke. His eager, distraught air had not been lost upon her.

“ Foolish fellow ! ” she thought. “ He is wondering if he dare aspire. Never mind. He will value his happiness the more when it comes.”

Then she looked the rose full in its blushing face and gave it a little smile of confidence.

The car-wheels sang for her all the way a song to which Margaret would turn a deaf ear.

“The sweetest flower that grows  
I give you as we part,  
To you ’t is but a rose,  
Ah me! It is my heart!”

“I suppose you would scorn a rose, Althea,” said Margaret, looking at the girl’s empurpled shirt-waist.

“I am satisfied,” was the smiling reply.

For a while they looked from the windows in silence at the New England landscape, each too well entertained with her own thoughts to need the other. Miss Gaylord’s sharp eyes and ears had read between the lines of the recent interview more perhaps than was there. At all events, nothing seemed so natural to her as for any man who saw Margaret to fall in love with her, and Vandyke was as satisfactory from an æsthetic point of view as any one she could hope to find. The fact that he had failed to recognize her existence this morning pleased her romantic sense. The concentration of his face and its Byronic gloom were entirely in accord with the fitness of things.

She wondered if it had anything to do with the sweet expression of Miss Carruth’s grave lips now? They seemed as if a smile lurked near the surface.

“Mr. Vandyke does n’t look well,” she said.

Margaret was too deeply immersed in her day-dream to hear the remark until it was repeated.

She nodded. "He told mother that his western trip had been very exciting," she answered.

"Isn't it hard on men to have to stay in the city and work all summer?" pursued Miss Gaylord tritely.

"Willard is sure of a fortnight."

"Well, isn't Mr. Vandyke?"

"Probably."

"Is he coming to Cliff Nest?"

"No, he is going to Spindrift, Mrs. Darling's cottage."

"What a shame!" ejaculated Miss Gaylord hotly.

"Why?" asked Margaret tranquilly.

Althea looked at her mutely. Miss Carruth had never, directly or indirectly, criticised her cousin's wife. Miss Gaylord did not dare to express her thoughts. She stirred restively.

"We can't talk about Mrs. Darling. You know that," she said at last.

"That is true."

"Then what do you mean--tempting me by asking 'Why'?" Althea gave an imitation of the other's manner which made Margaret smile.

"Oh well, it's all right," answered the latter vaguely.

"It is a pity your mother did not ask him sooner."



Miss Carruth did not answer, although she understood perfectly Mrs. Darling's generalship.

The following day Miss Gaylord wrote a note home.

“Oh, I *am* having such a good time!” it said. “Yesterday when we drove up to Cliff Nest I felt as if my heart would burst with feelings! Even if I am from Colorado, I never saw so much sunshine, so much sky, so much air, so much rocks, so much daisies and buttercups, and above all, so much water! I felt like the old woman who looked out on the ocean for the first time and thanked the Lord that at last He had let her see enough of something! Everything was just dancing in the sunlight and salt breeze, except the stiff, sweet, smelly trees that stand pointing at the sky like Puritans. They seemed to say, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan!’ to the South Wind when it laid hold of their twigs and invited them to whirl. There are such big piazzas here, and one can lie in the hammock way above the tide that sweeps the pebbles to and fro and sounds like — Oh, why am I such an earthy creature, with such prosaic thoughts! — it sounds like — I’ll whisper it — like putting in coal! Well, you just swing there in that hammock and think what energetic things you’re going to do some time! How you will climb down those rocks like a mountain goat, and play among the pebbles, and stand barefooted in the water on big slippery boulders, and squeal

when the waves break over you — and know all the time that you haven't energy enough to do a thing but count the white butterflies out at sea. Oh, it's the finest place ever!

• This morning, presto change! what a transformation! We woke up to a fog; and if there is anything more fascinating here than the sunshine, it is a fog. I am sitting by a crackling fire of logs, and outside the window the soft gray clouds have fallen way to the grass. There is nothing pacific about the Atlantic to-day, I tell you. It is booming against our cliff in what they call fog-waves, and when the sun comes out it will be a picnic just to watch Neptune cavort.

• I hope I wrote you that old Mr. Beebe died. I went to the funeral with the Carruths, and they have invited Miss Beebe up here. Aren't they the kindest people that ever happened? She will have such a happy, restful summer here, and this fascinating Nest is big enough for all the stray orphan birds that need a haven. You are perfect dears to let me have this visit, and I'll try to be such a nice girl when I get home that you'll be glad you let me get so close for a while to the Magnet. She sang this morning. Oh, how she sang! It hardly seemed safe in such a fog, for fear the sailors would hear and the vessels all pound to pieces on our cliff.

• Write often to your child in Paradise.

• ALTHEA."

It was not long before tired little Miss Beebe came from the inland dust of Springdale to be rejuvenated in the life-giving sea-air. Margaret sang to her by request on the very day of her arrival, and, much as the guest enjoyed it, she was still more thrilled by the significance of the act.

The first moment which she could secure with Mrs. Carruth alone, Miss Luella's eye seemed to be attacked with St. Vitus' dance — so fast and furiously did its knowing winks crowd upon one another.

"It's all right, Emeline, isn't it?" she exclaimed, using a cautious whisper although both the girls had gone with a local fisherman in his dory to visit his lobster-traps.

"I hardly dare to say," replied Mrs. Carruth.

"I'd give more for the look in your face than for any other assurance," said Miss Beebe triumphantly.

They were sitting in steamer-chairs in a portion of the piazza inclosed in glass to keep off the prevailing southeast winds.

"I have felt since we came here that it was like waking from a bad dream into the real world," said Mrs. Carruth. "The restful cessation from planning and executing, the knowledge when I waken in the morning that no one expects anything of me all day, is sweetness itself."

"I know it," said Miss Beebe sympathetically. "You do work like a slave!"

"Then, in addition, to have Margaret so light-hearted makes me very happy. That honest little Althea Gaylord is good for her. I like the girl thoroughly; but it has always been a surprise and a mystery to me that Margaret was sufficiently attracted to make a companion of her—such a light-weight as she is!"

"Ah, Emeline!" returned Miss Beebe shrewdly, "that is the very fascination. Margaret was a clever child, and you always expected her to have an old head on young shoulders, and held her up to the level of your own interests, as it were. This is one of the reactions to be expected. If she were a man, she'd have sown wild oats all over the place by this time. As it is, here's this flippant-talking, unconventional girl, utterly unlike anything Margaret is used to, and the unlikeness rests her and attracts her. It's one of the luckiest things that ever happened to Althea. She worships Margaret, and we grow like what we love best and think about most."

Mrs. Carruth looked troubled. "If you have seen me doing an injustice to Margaret all these years, why have n't you said so?"

"What right had I?"

"Every right, as you know."

Miss Beebe stirred uneasily; she always did at such references.

"I wasn't sure that you were making any mistake. I ain't one of those old maids who think

they are the only folks truly inspired as to bringing up children."

Mrs. Carruth looked far away. "Poor little Magnet!" she said thoughtfully. When her eyes again met Miss Beebe's, they were swimming. "I don't know much, Luella," she said humbly.

"Well, I don't know anybody that knows more," responded Miss Beebe warmly. "I was n't finding any fault. I was only explaining the way I'd thought it out. You have every reason to be proud of the result, whatever way you brought Margaret up: and now do tell me how — what — oh, you know, Emeline — are they engaged?"

"No," said Mrs. Carruth, shaking her head decidedly.

"Why, he's slower than molasses in winter!" ejaculated Miss Beebe resentfully.

"I don't think so at all," was the calm response. "He has been out of town almost constantly since the concert, and you must remember that if his state of mind is what we hope, he should feel some modesty in the matter, and that is what I believe now he is suffering from; for he is suffering; he was not himself at all on the last two occasions that I saw him."

Mrs. Carruth gave a humorous account of the brief interview in the train, to which Miss Beebe listened eagerly, her head cocked appreciatively on the side.

"And what does Margaret say?"

Mrs. Carruth smiled. "That is an odd question, Luella."

"I suppose you mean you would n't tell."

"I mean that you might know Margaret would n't say anything. I am even in doubt as to what she thinks. It is a great indication to me, however, that she sings and is happy."

"Why, of course it is. I never saw Margaret as happy." Miss Beebe's eyes snapped. "Have you invited him here?"

"Yes; but I was too late. He had accepted Mrs. Darling's invitation."

Miss Beebe set her thin lips together resentfully.

"Emeline Carruth, sometimes it seems as if I must speak right out!"

"I would n't. Mrs. Darling always entertains a great deal. She does n't care for quiet. Why should he not be one of her guests? He is a prime favorite with her husband."

"But I'd like to know how things are going to work around," said Miss Beebe aggrievedly.

"Oh, Spindrift is but a short distance away."

"But she won't let him come! She'll contrive to prevent him."

In her heart Mrs. Carruth knew there was much force in this argument; but she replied:—

"Then he will not want much to come. Where there's a will there's a way."

"Emeline Carruth,"—Miss Beebe raised herself

from the depths of the steamer-chair, — “Heaven helps those who help themselves. If you let fall come without having lost your daughter one way, you ’ll lose her another.”

“I ’m very much afraid of it,” returned the other gravely. She sighed. “But I ’m so tired, Luella. Let me do nothing now.”

“That ’s all right. You ’re like that man in the Mythology at school. He had to touch the earth once in so often to renew his strength.”

“Yes, that ’s it. I just need to be put out to grass for a little while.”

## CHAPTER XV

### SUMMER DAYS

A FEW days afterward Mrs. Darling, passing in her carriage, beckoned Willard French, who bowed to her from the sidewalk.

Obeysing her gesture, he approached as the equipage stopped.

"Why can't you come home to dinner with me?" she asked.

"I can. I remember the breeze you get on that fetching little balcony of yours." He stepped into the victoria and the horses started.

"Poor boy! Is your room hot? Come over and stay at our house whenever you like. It will be open most of the summer, for Henry will be coming and going."

"Oh, you are just about leaving, then?" French regarded approvingly her gray and white summer toilet and the cool little leafy bonnet she wore.

"Yes. Henry promises to divide his time between Boston and Crest View, so I might as well be there."

French hoped his wife, if he ever had one, would be less easily satisfied with impossible promises.



"I wish I could do that, — divide my time equally between Boston and Crest View."

"I wish you could. It should be a few miles nearer; but then, if it were, it would be instantly overrun and spoiled."

French took off his hat to the freshening air and sighed. "Only the wealthy enjoy this life," he remarked plaintively.

His companion regarded him with approving scrutiny. "You're not very clever, Willard. You ought to marry Margaret Carruth."

"That 's what I tell her."

"Oh, nonsense! You ought to treat the matter seriously."

"How do you know I don't, Molly Darling?"

"Because I'm sure no one in Boston has had so good a chance with her as yourself."

"No." French shook his head. "We began keeping house too early in life. It's against me. She forgets how amply I kept the larder supplied with mud-pies; she even complains that I insisted on making most of them myself."

"And you have drifted along, merely keeping up this joking relation between you, when you might have been that envied being, Margaret Carruth's husband."

The speaker's tone was one of genuine annoyance. French glanced at her curiously. The time had been when her resentment would have been roused by the slightest effort on his part in that direction.

"You know what a friend I am to you, Willard, and I have your best good at heart." She gave him a sweet smile. "You know all women are match-makers, more or less. Perhaps I am more."

French laughed. Mrs. Darling flushed, then decided not to take the laugh as a rudeness.

"At any rate, I have thought a great deal about this since Margaret's amazing success at that concert. She and her mother are very reserved, but if cousin Emeline is n't mortally opposed to Margaret's being a professional singer, then I have no penetration whatever. She naturally would be; and, you know, there is no telling what Margaret's heredity is and" —

"Hush!" interrupted French softly. "Be careful!"

"Who is to hear us, pray?"

"Oh, the carriage cushions may have ears; or the driver, who knows?"

Mrs. Darling gave a scornful little laugh. "You always were absurdly cautious. If you were an insurance man I'm sure you would not accept any risk greater than pig-iron under water."

"That is all right," returned French persistently. "If there is any division of opinion at present between Mrs. Carruth and Margaret, it behooves us not even to think of the thing that could divide them further."

"That could snap them as far asunder as the

poles, you mean," said Mrs. Darling, with a curious little smile.

"Possibly," admitted Willard; "possibly not."

"Well, I'm not thinking of it," said Mrs. Darling, in a changed tone. "I'm thinking of the opposite; namely, the thing that could bring them together: Margaret's marriage."

"Two people's business, as sure as you live," suggested French.

"Very well; but possibly you are one of the two: and even if I am not the other, I think you are not very civil." The speaker opened her eyes, the picture of grieved innocence.

French shook his head. "I'm only very sure that Margaret would not be pliable. There is no use in match-making for her."

"But for you there might be," rejoined the other. "When I see you throwing away a golden opportunity, what can I do? Cousin Emeline treats you like one of the family, you know she does."

"Yes."

"Do you believe there is another man in Boston who has a better chance?"

The question threw light for French. He thought he understood at last the trend of this unusual altruism. He smiled. "I appreciate, at any rate, your delicacy in not endeavoring to discover the condition of my heart."

Mrs. Darling shrugged her shoulders. "You

have common sense. You ought to be in the seventh heaven if you could make such a marriage as that. Look here, Willard, I'll help you to it. Come down to Spladrift for your vacation — of course you will spend part of it with the Carruths."

"I hope to."

"I will help you."

"How? By keeping Vandyke away?"

Mrs. Darling colored violently. "What has he to do with it?"

"I don't know. Do you?" French smiled directly into her displeased eyes. "I thought perhaps I might run against him at Cliff Nest; that's all."

Mrs. Darling recovered herself. "Mr. Vandyke is to be my guest."

"Oh, I see! Then you can have a nice little puppet-show; hold him off with one hand and set me on with the other, and pull a string for Magnet to come and go."

"You are an ungrateful, saucy man, and I have a great mind to wash my hands of you."

"So far as Magnet is concerned, you would better. The cable was never twisted that would serve as a string to pull in her case. Still," added French wickedly, "if you would transfer your kind interest from me to Vandyke, you might have more luck. He isn't such an old story; and" — confidentially — "since you ask me if there is a man

in Boston with a better chance in that quarter than mine, I should guess, from numerous trifles light as air, that Burton Vandyke is his name."

Mrs. Darling gave her dainty bonnet an unnecessary rearrangement. "I should say," she returned carelessly, "that Mr. Vandyke is scarcely a marrying man."

"I suppose you know," remarked French after a pause, "that the Carruths are at Cliff Nest."

"Do you suppose they would go without saying good-by to me?"

From one offense French had gone on unconsciously to another. His companion was extremely jealous of her reputation as near relative.

"How is the little Gaylord getting on?" proceeded Mrs. Darling. "I should suppose she would wilt by this time under that roof. I wonder if she is at all responsible for your cool attitude toward golden opportunities?"

"Oh, Molly Darling," with a sigh that was dangerously near a yawn, "you press me close, considering the state of the thermometer. As to my ward, she has deserted me."

"Gone home? Uncivil little creature! Let me see, though: perhaps it is I who have been uncivil. I haven't visited her for a long time; and I did mean to have her to dinner once."

"Do it at Spindrift. She is trying her wings at Cliff Nest at present on an indefinite invitation."

Mrs. Darling was very much astonished, and could not conceal it. She knew that the Carruths' philanthropy did not include spoiling their vacation. It was the sign of a sincere liking for Althea that they had taken her with them.

"This must be your doing, Willard. How now about your influence with Cousin Emeline?"

"Guess again. I never lifted my finger. It was only that Magnet said, 'Come,' and my ward did not hesitate an instant between us."

"Margaret Carruth and that little light-headed, superficial, slangy" —

"Slowly, slowly! Draw it mild, Molly! You meant to say that little clear-headed, kind-hearted, honest, resolute, generous girl"

"It *is* that tiresome child, then. Willard French!"

"Why," asked the young man plaintively, "must it be anybody before dinner on a day like this? How glad I am that you are incapable of offering a man hot soup to-night! Mrs. Barlow would do it and never flinch. Aren't those Darling's hospitable heels hovering over us now up there on the balcony?" added French, craning his neck and lifting his hat to his host, who nodded down as the carriage stopped.

Mrs. Carruth looked up at the tea-table a few evenings afterward from the examination of the letters that had been brought in to her.

"Mrs. Darling has arrived at Spindrift," she said.

"Where is Mr. Darling?" asked Miss Beebe alertly.

"She says he has just left town, and will come up here when he gets back. I do hope he can."

"Does n't generally get a chance to be here much, does he?" inquired Miss Luella, endeavoring not to throw too much significance into her tone.

"He is a very busy man; busy and hard-working." Mrs. Carruth glanced again at her letter. "Mrs. Darling wants me to send you, Margaret and Althea, to see her at once."

Althea looked at Margaret, who answered: —

"Yes, we will drive over to-morrow, or perhaps ride. Do you ride, Althea?"

"Do I? 'Bred an' bawn in a brier patch, Brer Fox. Bred an' bawn in a brier patch.' I used to tell Mr. French that missing my pony was the worst privation I had all winter."

The girls, when they arrived at Spindrift the next day, found Mrs. Darling lying in a hammock reading.

"You naughty girl!" she said good-humoredly to Althea. "Now Margaret has you to ride with, she will never need me any more." It was Mrs. Darling's habit to imply at all times a condition of things between herself and the Carruths which never existed. In the years during which they

had spent their summers at Crest View, the two had ridden together twice. "How well you both seem already," she continued, hospitably presenting chairs. "I suppose I look to you like crumpled white paper. Just wait a week. You have the start of me, but I shall catch up."

"What a daisy cottage," said Althea. "That is n't slang, Magnet, is it, with such lots of daisy snowdrifts about?"

Mrs. Darling, alertly sensitive, noted the familiar address and the affectionate confidence of the girl's manner.

"It is pretty, is n't it?" she responded.

"This is the one that should be named 'Nest,'" continued Althea.

"Oh, this is a humble little sparrow's nest, close to the ground," said Mrs. Darling. "Margaret's is the eagle's nest high on the cliff. However, each has its good points, so long as the little birds agree in it, as they do in the hymn."

"And both are on the ocean's edge, so what does it matter?" said Margaret, looking across the beach to a dazzle of water.

"Shall you have much company this year, Margaret?"

"I think not. Miss Beebe is with us now."

"How exciting! Dear me! — but you people are good to that little Miss Pry. Let me see. Somebody died; her father, was n't it? You went to Podunk — there — wherever it is she lives."



“Thank you,” smiled Margaret. “Podunk is my native place, and Willard French’s too. I have a great respect for the town, I assure you. I made mother take me to the old square white house with elms in front of it, where her parents lived and where I was born. A charming old place.”

“Oh, indeed?” said Mrs. Darling, examining her exquisite little finger-nail, pink and white and smooth as a jewel. “Forgive me. It is n’t Podunk, I remember. It is Spring-something.”

“Springdale; and Willard and I will defend it to the last.”

“Willard dined with me a few days ago, — such a warm evening, poor boy.”

“Yes indeed, the city is full of poor boys. Henry, for instance. How did you leave him?”

Margaret spoke without the least intention to offend, but Mrs. Darling changed color. She was always jealous of the Carruths’ love for her husband and suspicious that they criticised her.

“Henry left town the same day I did. I think traveling has become a nervous disease with him. I don’t believe he could be content a month in one place. I’ve made him promise to try it here, though.”

“I’m glad he did promise,” returned Margaret pleasantly.

“I was shrewd — foxy, Althea would say” — Mrs. Darling laughed and turned toward the girl, who shook her head.

"Oh, no, I should n't," returned Miss Gaylord. "It costs too much. I am economizing."

"Yes, I have heard about your sking box. Well, at all events, I was shrewd, and I baited Spindrift with Mr. Vandyke. If anything could content Henry here, it would be his presence."

"As if he needed any attraction beside you!" said Margaret, and Mrs. Darling so well knew her sincerity that she experienced a sensation of pleasure. Margaret's serenity, too, at her announcement, was gratifying. In Vandyke's case Mrs. Darling did not even feel the need of rousing the envy of other women. All she wanted was that they should let him alone and leave him to her. But the most honest of women would assume in such a case. She was not altogether satisfied. French's hints had heightened suspicions already formed.

"I suspect we shall quarrel a bit over Willard," continued Mrs. Darling. "You will want him and I shall want him."

Miss Gaylord listened attentively, although the appearance was that her attention was absorbed by the landscape.

"Probably we can effect a compromise," returned Margaret. "We can divide him."

"Very well. You may keep his head, to make love to you, girls, and I will take his feet. I need him more for tennis and dancing. As for you, Althea Gaylord," turning to the girl with mock

severity, "you and I must renew our acquaintance. You have been such a hermit all winter."

"What nerve!" thought Althea. What had Mrs. Darling done to prevent her being a hermit? But she replied mildly that she should be very glad.

"Have you tried the bathing yet?" pursued the hostess.

"Yesterday," returned Althea. "Miss Beebe went in with us." As she said it, she laughed with reluctant, infectious heartiness, her eyes becoming moist, as was their wont when she suspected her mirth might be disapproved by Margaret.

The latter smiled. "It seemed funny to Althea that Miss Beebe should wear her eye-glasses into the water," she explained.

"And it was cold," added Miss Gaylord, "and she stood on the edge and shook first one foot and then the other, just the way our terrier does when he gets into a place where there are burrs, and her hair was done up in a yellow handkerchief."

"Whose hair?" suggested Mrs. Darling insolently.

"And her teeth chattered."

"Whose teeth?"

"Children, children!" protested Margaret. "You looked too blue and pinched yourself, Althea, to make any comments on other people."

"I know I did," laughed the girl gayly. "For

the first minute I shrank till it seemed as if there would be nothing left of me: then I expanded. It was fine! Miss Beebe said herself she disliked it as much as a cat would: but she is going to do it for her health."

The irrepressible mischief in Miss Gaylord's countenance reminded Mrs. Darling of sundry incidents and experiences at Colorado Springs. It suddenly occurred to her that in the girl's evidently intimate relations with Miss Carruth, Althea could, if she had chosen, have let fall hints which would surely arouse Margaret's disapproval of her cousin's wife, and in view of the fact of Mrs. Darling's negligence of the girl all winter, it was certainly greatly to Miss Gaylord's credit if she had not done so. Mrs. Darling believed that she had not, and she looked now at Althea curiously, and mentally pronounced her a trumper.

"I'm sorry I haven't seen more of you," she said abruptly. "Margaret, don't you want to let me keep Althea here to-night?"

"In my habit? Oh no, I could n't!" protested the girl quickly.

"I have plenty of things that you could wear, and there is no one to see you but mermen."

"But I could n't let Magnet canter away miles and miles alone."

"My dear, she has done it hundreds of times. However, if you prefer another occasion, I will not insist."

When, a few days afterward, Mrs. Darling drove over to Cliff Nest, the maid told her that the family were out and scattered. The girl thought she might perhaps find Miss Gaylord, who had not been feeling well, and would not be likely to be gone far from home.

"I will find her myself if you think she is close by," said Mrs. Darling.

The maid pointed out a clump of firs across a rustic bridge that spanned a ravine, saying that there were hammocks there and that Miss Gaylord was fond of the place; so the visitor strolled thither.

Truly, she thought as she walked, it was worth considerable exertion to reach at last a summer home like this. The wild beauty of the spot appealed with an ever-fresh charm. On the bridge she paused, hemmed in by firs of arrow-like straightness, rooted far below in the ravine, whose smooth bark and bluish tinge explained the balsamic odors in the air. On the other side was the grove of sturdy weather-beaten trees, beyond which the rock-precipice descended to the tumbling blue waters foaming against its crags with a rhythmic roar.

Held safe above the climbing, inexorable power, lay in a hammock the young girl Mrs. Darling sought. She was reading, and her earnest brow betokened an absorbing interest in her book.

"For pity's sake, lend it to me!" said the

visitor, her voice sounding shrill to ears grown wonted to Ocean's heavy bass. "I am looking for something as interesting as that. Lie still! Don't move!" for Althea was hastening to rise. "I will take this other hammock. What are you reading?"

"The *Odyssey*."

"The *Odyssey*!" Mrs. Darling's amazement was ludicrous. "What for?"

"Because Miss Magnet was surprised that I never had read it."

"Well, Margaret Carruth is the typical Boston girl, sure enough."

"Minus the eye-glasses," drawled Althea.

"They'll come in good time, if she is loyally literary."

"She reads everything that is worth while."

The response for some reason made Mrs. Darling think of Burton Vandyke. Another cause for suspicion.

"A pity she didn't marry her cousin Henry," she remarked lightly. "But what she probably will do is to follow his example and marry a dolt. How disloyal of you, Allie, to desert from the ranks of the ignorammuses - or ignorami - which is it? If you are growing so learned, perhaps you can tell me."

"Call me Althea, please," said the girl with what to her visitor seemed a very funny demureness.

"Why? I used to know a jolly girl named Allie Gaylord."

"Yes, but she's dead. Died in Newbury Street, Boston."

"And Willard French never told me. How heartless of him!"

"Perhaps he thought it would n't interest you."

"There it comes!" remarked Mrs. Darling buoyantly. "I wondered how long it would be before you reminded me that I have failed in friendship. I know it, Allie; but it has been a very strange winter to me, — a very strange winter, and very full." The speaker looked off through the trees to the foam creaming over a distant ledge. "I have been, in a small way, studying too."

"There's no resisting Boston's culture, is there?" returned Althea, closing one eye and gazing unblinkingly at the firmament with the other.

"Well, in my case," said Mrs. Darling, poking the toe of her shoe into the matted needles that carpeted the stony ground, "it was a mixture of Boston and Philadelphia. Mr. Darling is always patient, and Mr. Vandyke has bothered himself a lot for me."

"Mr. Darling is patient," assented Miss Gaylord, and the mild answer flushed her companion's cheek. She had not forgotten the day when the Western girl arraigned her in nervous if not good English for her dallyings; but she had taken the

long drive to Cliff Nest to-day with a purpose, and fortune had favored her in finding Althea alone. She would not waste time in trivial reminiscences.

"I forget if you know Mr. Vandyke," she said.

"Well, that is amusing!" remarked Miss Gaylord nonchalantly. "Ask Mr. Vandyke if I don't make as good tea as you do."

"Is it possible? Well, my dear, I begin to think that it is I who have been a recluse. But then, of course, he is such a friend of Willard French."

There was a moment's pause: then Mrs. Darling went on in a lowered tone. "Do you know, I heard something strange two or three days before I left town. I heard Margaret Carruth's name coupled with Mr. Vandyke's."

"What is strange about that?" asked Althea so coolly that the visitor's heart gave a little thump, although she returned her look calmly.

"Oh, you think it natural. Mr. Vandyke is too intimate a friend of mine to be having definite plans of that sort without my knowing it. You, however, may know more of Margaret's attitude than I do."

The slight sneering emphasis on the name roused all Althea's caution and loyalty: but the carelessness of her manner was unchanged.

"Oh no," she returned lightly. "I'm not sure whether Miss Magnet remembers his existence between times or not. She rarely mentions him.



That is the reason I speak of it at all. I am on the outside, looking at them like the rest of the world, and I realize how gladly many people would see them join hands."

"Why?"

"Oh, there would be such evident fitness in it."

And then, for Molly Darling's punishment, because she had startled her with the fear of having admitted something to Margaret's hurt, Althea gave a description, humorous but significant, of the manner in which Burton Vandyke had seen their party off in Boston.

Mrs. Darling listened and laughed. He had not sent her any flowers. He had not been at the train to say good-by to her, so she laughed appreciatively, and told Althea it did her good to hear her funny yarns again, and that she must surely come over to Spindrift and stay for days.

But her talk thereafter was vague. She did not specify the days, and it did not astonish Althea that she was never sent for.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE BETRAYAL

THE light that never was on sea or land enveloped her surroundings for Margaret Carruth in these days. The radiance of a great content beamed softly in the depths of her eyes, and something new to her strong and undemonstrative nature lent sweetness to her smile.

Miss Beebe watched her dubiously. "I've always thought folks in love were mostly melancholy," she remarked to Mrs. Carruth, much to that lady's amusement.

"Then Margaret is not," replied the latter.

"Well, something has happened to her," declared Miss Luella.

Margaret knew herself that something had happened to her—that transfiguring something which turns a dingy town street into a paradisiacal bower, and made the surroundings at Cliff Nest take on enchantment which filled each hour with wondrous possibilities. Every breeze was the bearer of a message, every ecstatic bird-song a voicing of her own heart's fullness.

Since that day of parting on the train she had not doubted; then what remained but to thank

God for life, and wait for the fruition of that which had blossomed ?

Alone in a rocky seat which was her secret, hidden by ledges of granite which sheltered her from too boisterous wind, the girl often lived over the calendar of her winter. Its red letter days were few, — very few considering how much from her mother's standpoint had been accomplished.

It astonished her to realize how comparatively seldom she and Burton Vandyke had been together, how little she really knew about him — of his previous life and friends, of his family and traditions. All that seemed superfluous. The leaping of her thought to his, the deep satisfaction of his presence, the first proud, glad admission of her soul that there might be a mate for her, were the oases along the way which promised that her wilderness should blossom as the rose.

She even dwelt willingly on the moments when his abstraction had hurt and disappointed her. His lack of susceptibility had been one of his charms. She leaned upon his intellect ; and that day in the train she had read his dismay at finding himself robbed of that intellect's supremacy.

“ Will he be afraid of me — of my money ? ” she mused, leaning her chin in her palm, her shining eyes looking out on the billows. “ Will he be afraid of mother ? ”

The addition brought a tide of red to her cheeks and a catch in her breath.

"Ah, I hope mother will be careful!" she breathed, half aloud.

She ran over in her mind the list of men who had wished to marry her: true hearts were among them, that she knew, but they had never touched her with aught but uneasiness. Among them Vandyke towered like a king.

From them she had always turned away toward her ideal of the professional life. Before him that ideal hesitated, shrank. Could her voice express to him a tithe of the nameless, unutterable things that he had brought to her consciousness and that made life the heavenly thing it was, its gift would not be hidden.

All the world, from the far-reaching vault of the firmament to the tiniest wave-kissed pebble below her, held a promise for her now, — the portent of great good. When would he come? Where should she first meet him? Where would they be when — he —

Mrs. Darling had been here several days ago and had told Althea that it would not be long before he arrived. She, Margaret, must call at Spindrift before he came. Why not now, this very afternoon? It would be unsafe to postpone.

Althea was away somewhere. All the better. Margaret was in the mood to have no companion but Nature. She would take a brisk gallop to her cousin's cottage and be back by tea-time.

As she went into the house, Miss Beebe on the

piazza called to her, "That you, Margaret? Where are you off to now?"

The girl came and leaned her arms on the back of a chair, her look still far away among those dreams that had come to be life's most substantial reality.

"I thought I would ride over to Mrs. Darling's a little while."

Miss Luella scrutinized her appreciatively. "Seems 's if I'd hardly seen you since I came here, Margaret. You don't look like the girl you were when I talked to you last in Boston. You were n't finding life so interesting then as you do now, seems to me."

"Is life ever so interesting as it is here?" returned Margaret.

"Nice place; and it would do you good, I think, to fling all care to the winds while you are here."

"Why, I do."

"Not if you feel obliged to make calls on Mrs. Darling," said Miss Beebe bluntly.

Margaret raised her eyebrows. "She is alone now. Later she will be surrounded with guests."

"Yes, and I know Mr. Vandyke is going to be one of them. She's silly about him," said Miss Luella intrepidly. "I've seen it."

So had Margaret many a time, with a fastidious shrinking which had in it no tinge of jealousy.

"I tell you, Margaret Carruth, it's the short-sightedest thing a woman can do to marry a man

if she finds out even at the eleventh hour that she isn't wholly happy in the thought of it. Talk about broken promises and honor, and all the rest of it!" Miss Beebe's voice expressed vast scorn. "Look at Molly Darling. She did that thing, as I happen to know; and dearly her husband has had to pay for that hardly kept promise."

"Why, mother never told me this," said Margaret, wondering. "Did she ask to be released, and did Cousin Henry refuse to release her?"

"Indeed she did not. Mr. Darling was a rich man then, and she wanted to marry him in spite of the fact that he bored her."

"He loves her still," said Margaret, "and I suppose we should not criticise her." At the same time her thoughts reverted to yesterday, when she had met Molly Darling walking with a man friend, a mutual acquaintance, named Badger, whom Margaret heartily disapproved. Her family pride had been afflicted by the familiar attitude this person was taking with her cousin's wife, and the pleased coquetry of her responses. For the first time in her life she had determined to speak to Mrs. Darling and beg her not to be too gracious to this man.

"I know you and your mother have persevered in a wise silence," returned Miss Beebe; "but down here, where a body can breathe, it seems as if freedom of speech ought to come in too."

"Cousin Henry is such a good man," said Mar-

garet gently. "It seems as if she must tire of most of these friends of hers and come to enjoy his companionship more."

"But what I say is," declared Miss Beebe vigorously, "she did him a wrong to marry him."

"Of course; if any woman marries a man for his money, she does him a wrong."

"Yes; but my point is that even if he had n't been well off, and she had married him simply to keep a promise, she would n't have been doing the highly virtuous thing that people usually consider it. It's never too late to mend until the nuptial knot is tied, according to my theory. Dead promises shouldn't be considered any more than the withered leaves that fly around in autumn. It is too dangerous, too dangerous."

"What a radical you are!" exclaimed Margaret, the irrepressible fountain of happiness in her heart sending its sparkling light up into her eyes as she smiled. "You make me afraid of my own opinions when I hear them stated so extremely."

"You hold that opinion too, then?" Miss Beebe looked interested.

"Yes. It is comparatively easy to hold it from the woman's standpoint, though. When a woman gives up a man, even if the world says she jilts him, public opinion is not hard on her; but if a man breaks his compact with a woman, he is considered dishonored."

"Well," said Miss Luella, "you see, he *asked* the woman."

"Certainly; but she *promised* him."

"I know. I'm rather inclined myself to think it's as broad as it is long. All the same, I'd hate to have my brother make a woman love him, ask her to marry him, and then find out he'd made a mistake. When they do, it's generally that they find they like some other woman better."

"Yes," said Margaret, with a nod of decision, "and I have always held that that was good and sufficient reason for breaking a man's engagement. Anything else seems to me a short-sighted and false sense of honor."

"Well, you've got good courage. I guess if it was your own brother, you'd weaken out of that conviction."

"No," said Margaret with firmness. "I would stand by him. I would encourage him. If the other woman would have him, I should help on the match. If society looked askance at him, it should look askance at me."

Miss Beebe shook her head doubtfully. "It sounds like an easy, selfish good time you're planning out for that brother of yours."

Miss Carruth smiled. "Where have your principles fled to, I should like to know?"

"Take care, Margaret," said Miss Beebe cautiously. "Principle and good times don't very often go together."



The girl laughed. "O Miss Luella, it is easy enough to trace your ancestry. I believe the Puritans refrained from eating pie just because they liked it."

"Well, you know there's a general feeling that when it's the man who has made the mistake, he ought to go through with it. Men aren't so good as women, of course," added Miss Beebe naively, "or there would n't be laws made about breach of promise cases."

"Oh," Margaret's lips curled slightly, "we are not talking about that sort of people. It happens sometimes to a loyal, well-balanced, honorable man that he gets into an engagement with the wrong woman."

"And for her he is the right man," put in Miss Beebe.

"Granted. There must be a hurt somewhere. The question is, doesn't mother's favorite rule apply, and should n't the effort be to bring about the greatest good to the greatest number?"

"You mean that the man, having proceeded to fall in love with the right woman, should marry her regardless of obstacles, so that two out of three instead of one out of three, should be happy."

"Not only that," said Margaret gravely; "there are the children to be considered. I know children — of the rich too — who are like plants in a dark cellar, because the sunshine of love is n't all about them."

"Well, if you are going on to the next generation, you have thought this out."

"It is a way I have if a subject comes to my mind at all. I often think how different my life and inheritance would have been if father and mother had not been so devoted to each other. You remember father's ways with mother?"

Miss Beebe's eyes fell away from the clear ones regarding her. "Oh, yes indeed, yes indeed," she replied hastily.

"Then beside, if marriage is marriage at all, it is a spiritual thing," said Margaret. "Where is the right of going into an external compact with one when the whole real self of you goes out to another? What a strange, distorted thing it is to call that honor, goodness, truth, generosity, and all the other terms that people are willing to apply to such an act, if they happen to discover that any man in fiction or in fact is denying himself and fulfilling his outgrown compact! I may stand alone in my theory, I know it is unpopular enough, but I should honor the man who had courage to decline at all risks to perjure himself, just as much as I should the woman who refused to marry except for love."

Miss Beebe gazed fascinated at the illumined, expressive face.

"You're at a very interesting stage of life, my dear," she said at last, "the time when all theories seem practical."

"I have an idea that I shall not change my mind."

"We all had that idea once," returned Miss Beebe.

Margaret, smiling, straightened herself. "Well, I must get down from my hobby and mount my horse, or I shall not get back from Mrs. Darling's in time for tea," she said, and went into the house to put on her habit.

As it happened, her choice of a day was not a good one for visiting Mrs. Darling. That lady had in the morning received a letter from Vandyke which disappointed and angered her.

He had written that his hopes for a connected vacation were becoming very dim; that he should hope to run down to see his friends at Crest View before the season was over. It would be a cooling and comfortable sensation to be able to place them in their summer homes and to think of them when the thermometer was at its height, but there was no prospect now that he could make such a visit as Mrs. Darling had kindly proposed.

"This is the Carruths' doing!" she thought hotly. She had dwelt on Althea's picture of the parting in the train, and pondered upon the girl's gratuitous hints of Mrs. Carruth's liking for Vandyke, until she had built up a supposititious condition of things to which this note gave the finishing touch.

She was bitterly, painfully jealous of Mar-

garet Carruth. What a lot was hers! And she foresaw a future where Vandyke stood by the girl's side in a life crowned by all the prosperity in this world's gift. Only now she discovered that this expected visit had been the pivot on which her summer turned. The pleasure of being Vandyke's hostess, of planning his actions, of driving with him to Cliff Nest and letting the Carruths see their excellent comradeship, of going with him to the assemblies at the adjacent fashionable hotel; in short, of owning his escort for a fortnight in the face and eyes of those who would thus be forced to acknowledge the scope of her fascination, — this had been her dear desire; and it had been brought low by what? Doubtless by the influence of the Carruths, whose strong, quiet supremacy she was forced to acknowledge with a resentment which was burning fiercely at the moment when Margaret jumped lightly down at her door.

Mrs. Darling recognized her with a leap of the heart. Knowing her own excitement, she summoned all her self-control. Angry as she was, to quarrel with Miss Carruth would be an impolitic act, far-reaching in its consequences. Like a flash there came into her mind a maxim quoted to her by her husband in one of his rare and gentle protests against her reckless speeches: —

“Of the unspoken word you are master,  
The spoken word is master of you.”

Here Margaret caught sight of her through the window and hastened in at the open door. How happy she looked! Happiness is a beautifier, and in a face like Margaret's, where expression is so varying and powerful as at times to be transfiguring, it was a power indeed. Its eloquence did not soothe her hostess, who instantly wondered if this gladness might not proceed from a letter different in purport from that which lay on the table near her.

"How does it happen that you are not out on the piazza?" asked the girl. "The day is perfect."

"I know. I have a headache — slight, it will pass. Sit down."

"I see you are not yourself. Too bad! Ills of the flesh should not pursue us here. It is well that it happens that you have not the responsibility of a guest just now."

Mrs. Darling's suspicious ear thought she detected a note of exultation in the speech. "Yes," she replied, in a measured way. "I had expected Mr. Vandyke might be here by this time."

"Oh, I did n't know it was so soon."

"Perhaps you have learned of some change in his plan."

"I? No." Margaret could not help it: a rich tide of color turned even her brow rosy, and Mrs. Darling's gaze devoured her.

"Her mother has written him, then," she

thought swiftly. "Where is Miss Gaylord to-day?" she asked.

"I think she went sailing with one of the fishermen. She knows them all better in a fortnight than I have come to do in years."

Such rich content spoke in the girl's bright tone. Such gifts were hers. It seemed unjust that health, a clear conscience, and the love of such a man should be heaped upon the pressed-down measure of her benefits!

"How are your plans for the stage progressing?" asked Mrs. Darling suddenly.

Margaret's face sobered. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, isn't it a little unnecessary to be so close-mouthed with me? It is common talk in Boston that you enter the profession of a singer in the autumn."

"I should think you would know that common talk is often wrong."

"You can tell me," said Mrs. Darling, with a certain hardness of manner that was foreign to her light ways, and surprised the visitor. "You need not be afraid I shall talk. You told me yourself long ago that it was your ambition."

"It was," said Margaret, hesitating.

"Has it ceased to be?" asked the hostess sharply. "That is strange, after your success of St. Timothy's. One might guess that somebody had turned your thoughts toward a domestic life."

The girl bit her lip. A rough hand seemed knocking at the door of her inmost reserve.

"Mother and I have had a talk about it," she replied after an instant, with quiet dignity. "We have suspended a conclusion."

"I see, until — until what?" Mrs. Darling gave a hard laugh, exulting in the success with which she had sent the genial light out of the eyes regarding her, and summoned a shrinking, startled look in its place; but Margaret gathered her forces.

"Until the working season begins again. I shall be helped to see what to do by the way opportunities open."

"I understand. Well, good luck follows you. You were born with the golden spoon in your mouth. Heigho! mine was pewter."

"No indeed, Cousin Molly." The girl spoke gently. She saw that her hostess was under some strain. Even if it were only that of ennui, the result was lamentable. It was rare that Mrs. Darling heard the cousinly address, but instead of being pleased, she suspected the compassion of a successful rival.

"You mustn't say that," went on Margaret. "Your path looks rosy to an outsider, though you may see thorns, and you have the dearest husband in the world."

Mrs. Darling bit her lip. She took this reference as a reproof. "Really," she said, smiling,

"I think I ought to lend Henry to the Carruths. They appreciate his virtues so highly."

Margaret smiled too, good-temperedly, and arose. "As he isn't here, lend us yourself, won't you? Can't you be more neighborly? You have called at Cliff Nest only once."

"Yes, I'll come soon. Fred Badger wants me to try some new horses of his to-morrow. We may as well come to your house as anywhere."

Miss Carruth stiffened at the name. She dreaded to express her feelings, but she summoned her moral courage. "I'm sorry to say it, Cousin Molly, but I don't like Mr. Badger. Please come without him."

"Oh, you don't like Mr. Badger?" Mrs. Darling's breath began to come with difficulty. "Why, pray? Are not my friends good enough for you?"

"He isn't a good man, Cousin Molly." The girl spoke deprecatingly. "And he isn't a man to whom we can do any good."

Mrs. Darling's nostrils were dilating with her effort at controlling the hysterical breathing as she stood looking hard into her visitor's soft eyes. This was Margaret's chance to carry out her determination. It was very difficult, but she had always had a certain influence with Mrs. Darling, and so good an opportunity would not occur again.

"I saw you with him yesterday. I couldn't



bear to see his open admiration. It is n't complimentary to your husband to let such a man look — look closely at you."

Mrs. Darling gasped and laughed. This girl in her arrogance, for whom the cream of life rose, ready for her fastidious acceptance, dared criticise her, reprove her! All the cumulative resentment of the day flared to a blaze of jealous hatred, whose only hope of satisfaction lay in dragging Margaret from her pedestal and seeing her writhe in the dust.

The laugh died. "By what right do you dare dictate, or even suggest to me as to my friends?"

The baleful fire in the speaker's eye, the white rage in her face, appalled Margaret, but she did not quail. "Only the right of relationship. Only that your husband is my cousin," she answered, the calm and dignity of her bearing undisturbed.

Some foreign power inside Mrs. Darling seemed suddenly to possess her. She lost all self-control.

"You are not," she retorted savagely, "you are not his cousin! You are not a Carruth at all!"

"Poor girl!" said Margaret, laying her hand on the other's arm. "Lie down, lie down on the divan. You are really ill."

Mrs. Darling shook her arm free and laughed.

"I never was better. You are not a Carruth. People don't know who you are, but they know that much. Common talk is right for once. Mrs.

Carruth's position ties people's tongues, but not their thoughts."

The anxious gaze in the girl's eyes changed slowly to incredulity, perplexity, then to a blank stare, while she stood immovable, the folds of her riding-habit falling about her. Mrs. Darling gloated over the transformation. Only when a white, stiff change came and altered the young countenance until no one would have recognized it as belonging to the girl who entered the room a little while ago, did her sweet revenge begin to seem dearly bought.

"Say that again!" said Margaret at last, hoarsely. "I don't understand."

Mrs. Darling shrugged her shoulders, braving the chill that had begun to follow her heat. "It's a fact. You have no right to Henry or to any of the Carruths. You were" — she smiled insolently. "I suppose Mrs. Carruth knows what you were. I don't."

## CHAPTER XVII

### MOTHER AND CHILD

IN the silence that followed, Mrs. Darling's sated anger changed in spite of herself to tardy regret and fear. Margaret's starting eyes were terrible to her in the unseeing expression which came into them. Unable longer to bear the stillness, she broke it.

"I have given you a shock," she said, trying to speak hardily, "but you forced me into it. I had better go home with you."

The girl's eyes focused again upon her hostess with a look of shrinking and horror hard to sustain. "No," she said softly, but with such repugnance that Mrs. Darling stood mute while Margaret turned and with slow steps seemed to grope her way from the room.

She passed out the house-door, across the piazza, and down the steps. Her horse whinnied at her approach. She looked at him strangely. He belonged to the Carruth household. He was none of hers, — foolish creature, with the expressive, affectionate eyes, gazing at her as he pawed the sandy soil. He would have to know it in time. Perhaps he did know it now, and was keeping it from her like all the rest.

When next she was conscious of consecutive thought, she was halfway home, the horse beneath her hastening at his best speed to his supper, unguided.

One consideration came to her with a throb, — a gleam of relief amid black clouds of shame and dishonor.

“My voice. It does not belong to the Carruths, and the world is wide.”

She held her stunned and straying mind to this idea while the muffled thud of her horse's hoofs beat steadily on the soft ground. At last he cantered into the domain of Cliff Nest. The sky, the sea, the rocks, the trees, were cruelly, deceitfully similar to those she had left in that other state of life when she was Margaret Carruth, sovereign of happiness. Now she was a clod, a stumbling, aimless, nameless thing that must go on living. The horse would stop in a minute, then what should she do?

A bright voice sounded from the piazza, — a voice from the world she used to live in: Althea's, gay, reproachful. It seemed for an instant to rally her unstrung nerves into order.

“You runaway! Are n't you ashamed to steal such a march on me?” The girl ran to meet her, her face full of welcome.

Margaret slipped from her horse, and Althea, as she affectionately seized her gloved hands, started at the staring eyes and pale face that met her.

"What's the matter? You have had a sun-stroke? What?"

"No; I'm only not a Carruth. That is all." Margaret passed her hand over her eyes. "If there were any way of my being alone with you, Althea, perhaps I shouldn't go mad trying to think."

Poor Althea nearly fainted in her vague terror, but love made her heroic.

"Tea is just ready," she answered. "Go up to your room, and I will arrange it and be with you soon."

Then, her knees quaking under her, the young girl went to the dining-room, where Mrs. Carruth and Miss Beebe were already seated.

"I just saw Margaret ride in," said Mrs. Carruth, looking up. "Althea, won't you ask her not to mind waiting to change her habit? It would be so much more sociable to come in just as she is."

"We want a favor," said Althea. And if her usual deliberate tone was a little unsteady, the others did not notice it. "May I take some tea upstairs for Magnet and me? We have some important matters to discuss."

Mrs. Carruth looked surprised. "Won't they keep one hour?" she began; but Miss Beebe interrupted.

"I wonder if Mr. Vandyke has n't come to Mrs. Darling's?" she inquired, looking at Althea.

"I don't know. I don't know what Magnet has to tell me."

"There! Let 'em go!" laughed Miss Beebe. "Girls will be girls."

And Mrs. Carruth, mindful of past comments on Margaret's lack of girlish privileges, agreed reluctantly. She did not see much sense in the arrangement, and she liked utility.

Althea, with a trembling heart, approached her friend's door and knocked. The fact that there was no answer dismayed her still further; but overcoming her dread, she opened the door and entered. Margaret was sitting there in her habit, staring into vacancy.

She looked up at Althea's entrance, and watched her while she arranged the tea-tray on a little table. The girl had declined to let a servant assist her.

"I'm glad you are here," said Margaret, approaching her friend as she caught her eye, and smiling strangely as she put an arm around her. "You are not a Carruth either."

"Why, what do you mean by that, Magnet darling?" asked Althea. "But wait: you frighten me by looking so ill. Drink a cup of this tea, and afterwards we will talk."

"That tea? Oh, no. I have no right to it, you know. I have no right to anything here — except" — lowering her voice — "a shameful one. Poor Mr. Carruth!" sighing. "No wonder he died."

"Come here, Magnet." Althea spoke firmly, and led her to a wicker divan. Drawing her down, she held her hands tightly. "Look straight into my eyes. I understand at last that Mrs. Darling has been talking to you. Do you know that she hates you? Hates you chiefly on account of Mr. Vandyke. She is jealous of you."

"Oh, no. Why should she be? She has known all the time that she could stab me when the time came. It is common talk. Everybody knows it. I suppose you have known it all along."

"Known what?"

"That I am not a Carruth."

"What nonsense! I never heard of such a thing! I don't believe it!"

"Why, that makes me still gladder you are here." Margaret smiled again in the way that, for all its gentleness, made a chill creep over her companion. "We learn of it together. I have a real friend. How much that means to a girl who has lost all: a shelter, clothing, food, and" — in a frightened whisper — "a name. I have no name, Althea."

"My sweetheart, it's false!" A sob rose in the girl's throat. "Mrs. Darling has lied to you. Be sure of it. She must have been mad with rage, — she who is always so politic. Let me call your mother" —

"No!" The exclamation was so sudden that Althea started, and Margaret went on deliberately.

“Never again in this world will I see her who should not have been my mother. She could not now support the sight of me any more than I could bear to see her.”

“Margaret Carruth, you amaze me! Poor girl!” with a change of tone. “That wicked woman has half-crazed you, or you would not be so ungrateful. Do you mean to say you are so quick to believe a jealous, frantic creature like Mrs. Darling, that you will not even hear your mother’s explanation?” Althea took her companion in her arms and drew her head against her own cheek. “Shut your eyes, dear, and think of your mother’s face. Think of her fair brow, with those clear eyes looking out on all the world to do good. Think of her directness and honesty and power. Think of the respect felt for her, the universal deference to her wisdom; her lofty aims and her beautiful life.”

Margaret passed her hand over her eyes confusedly. “She has deceived me,” she said.

“Mrs. Darling has deceived you worse, be sure of it. O Magnet! when I think of your suffering the last hour, and how you have credited the worst that woman could concoct, I want to — but she will be punished. Now, don’t disappoint me. You have been my ideal so long. Be strong and sensible and generous. Whatever fire there is under all this foul smoke, we’ll find it, never fear; but you must get back your self-control.



"I will make some fresh tea, and you must drink it."

Margaret leaned back exhausted, and followed her with her eyes as she went to the kettle. When the tea was brought she drank some; and meanwhile Althea's thoughts flew fast. She shrank inexpressibly from inflicting such pain upon Mrs. Carruth as would result from bringing her here now, even if Margaret would consent to see her.

"I think I will go to Boston to-night," said Margaret suddenly, setting her cup down beside her.

"To whom, Magnet?" asked her friend in dismay.

"To Willard. He is not a Carruth, and I believe he will be a friend to me still, and help me to plan."

Althea's heart fluttered fast, but she controlled herself. "Very well," she said quietly. "Of course I shall go with you when you go; but you are not reasoning sensibly, Magnet. You are too ignorant of facts. I have seen Mrs. Darling in hysterics. I know how excitable she is, and how angry she can grow."

As she paused, mute in her puzzle, a ray of light suddenly came to the girl's distressed brain. A face, small, alert, with ever-inquiring eye-glasses, dawned upon her problem like the vision of a deliverer.

"My dear, wait!" she said suddenly. "If

there is any truth in what you have heard, and that there has been talk about it, Miss Beebe will know all that any one does. It would be wild for you to go to Boston without understanding the situation. Let me bring Miss Beebe to you."

"Can you manage not to let—any one else know?"

"I'm sure I can," said Althea, relieved by the tacit consent. She moved to the door with alacrity. "I will send her to you and come back when she has gone."

"No, you must be here. It wouldn't be fair to you to let you go on as my friend in ignorance."

Althea looked back reproachfully; but the rigid face and wide eyes warned her to let minor considerations drop. She ran downstairs and put her head into the dining-room.

"Miss Beebe, can I see you when you have finished tea?" she asked.

Mrs. Carruth looked over her shoulder. "You and Margaret have made quick work," she remarked.

"We are not through yet, but a question has come up—a dispute that we want Miss Beebe to settle."

The latter looked pleased as Althea with a bright nod retired.

"Now, what do you suppose those girls are up to?" she said. "Secrets behind closed doors,

and I let into them ! I'll warrant it is something about your birthday, Emeline — why, of course it is ! It comes next week, and here I've let the cat's tail out of the bag already ! What a shame ! Well, you can be unconscious."

"Oh, I will be unconscious," rejoined Mrs. Carruth, smiling. "I see you are perishing to be off, Luella. You need n't wait for me after you have finished. This meal seems to be a movable feast, anyway."

Thus encouraged, Miss Beebe was soon trotting briskly upstairs, full of pleasant interest in the coming interview. In spite of her prognostication, she was not without a lurking hope that the subject of it might be Vandyke after all. She had dared to mention him and Mrs. Darling to Margaret. Possibly, if he had arrived, the girl wished to consult her on the matter.

Smilingly she knocked at the closed door and entered. At once she caught sight of Margaret's stony face. "What are you thinking of, Althea Gaylord?" she asked sharply, hurrying to the divan. "Why did n't you tell us Margaret was ill?"

"Because she did n't wish it known," returned the girl, and Miss Beebe was almost as strangely impressed by her unusual manner as by Margaret's. The latter sat passive, looking at the newcomer.

"What is it, my child, my dear little girl?"

asked Miss Beebe anxiously, her thoughts in a whirl. Had Mrs. Darling eloped with Burton Vandyke? "You need your mother, my dear!"

A shudder passed through Margaret. "I sent for you," she began slowly, "to tell me about both my father and my mother."

Miss Luella started. "What a — a question — when you remember your father as — as well as" —

"Never mind all that," said the girl drearily. "Mrs. Darling has told me."

Miss Beebe's heart almost stopped beating.

"I see it is hard for you," went on Margaret. "It is hard for us all; but I didn't want to go without knowing more."

"Go? Go where?"

"To some place where people tell the truth, and where they don't know who I am."

"Why, Margaret!" ejaculated Miss Beebe, her face working.

"Go on, please. I understand it is hard in your loyalty to your friend."

"Child, you'll drive me crazy if you use that cruel tone!"

"Tell her, Miss Beebe!" commanded Althea. "How can you prolong the strain? Mrs. Darling has told her that she is not a Carruth. She wants the facts, whatever they are, and the kindest thing for poor Mrs. Carruth is to tell everything quickly."

Miss Luella trembled so she could scarcely speak. It seemed like a dream, and no reality, that she was face to face with Margaret Carruth, forced to corroborate the words of the base betrayer.

"Your father was a carpenter," she said tremulously. "He died before you were born."

Margaret's mouth looked hard. "How did it happen that Mr. Carruth consented to bring me up — to be a father to me?"

"Why, he was as pleased as your mother was," protested Miss Beebe tremulously.

"Pleased? My mother pleased!" Margaret's eyes were awful, and Miss Luella opened her lips without being able to utter another word.

Althea looked from one to the other breathlessly. "Wait!" she cried. "Is Mrs. Carruth Margaret's mother?"

"Her — her" — stammered Miss Beebe; these hard-wrung confessions were torture. "Not, of course — not really, but" —

"There, do you hear, darling? Do you hear?" The joyous exclamation enlightened Miss Luella and sent a flame through her. She jumped up with such vigor that her chair fell over. "Is that what that fiend hinted?" she exclaimed. "Margaret Carruth, your mother was as good and sweet a woman as lives! I knew her well; but she loved her husband too much to stay after him, and she gave her baby to me for my friend. Oh,

poor child!" for slowly Margaret slid down, fainting, on her couch. "Mrs. Carruth! I'll call her," cried Miss Luella, in a panic.

"You must n't!" Althea sprang to the door and locked it. "This is no time for that. Here, help me."

Together they loosened Margaret's habit, chafed her hands, and rubbed cologne on her temples, Althea giving directions in a business-like way which Miss Beebe never forgot.

Soon the eyes of the fainting girl opened and glanced from one to the other of the faces bending over her.

"I'm sorry -- to trouble you," she said: then her look strayed to a window and remained there. The rigidity had gone from her face, and, pale as it was, Althea saw the strange, set despair had gone with it.

She beckoned Miss Beebe from the room. "Let us leave her a little while," she said.

Out in the hall Miss Luella wrung her hands. "How am I ever going to tell Mrs. Carruth?" she groaned. "How do you suppose Margaret will meet her? Oh! if ever a woman ought to be hung by the neck until dead, it's Molly Darling! She has murdered the happiness of my poor friend and changed life for that girl, whose little finger is worth her whole trumpery body."

"When I think what a shock it is to me," said Althea, weak after the tension, "I can imagine

what it must be to Magniet. Why, it will take me months to realize that she is no kin to all those people she has told me so much about. Only yesterday she was telling me of her relatives and speaking of some of her own hereditary traits. Let me tell you though, Miss Beebe, that Mrs. Darling, without intending it, did Mrs. Carruth a good turn by that wicked slur. In the reaction and relief from that, Magniet will find the actual facts easier to bear."

"Althea Gaylord, you're a real smart girl," returned Miss Beebe, with broken gratitude. "I believe you're right, and it'll be a tempering of the wind to poor shorn Emeline. She'd lose the whole world if she lost that child's love. There! if it was n't so selfish, I'd wish myself safe in Springdale. I would n't care how sweltering hot it was if I did n't have to face that poor dear and tell her. Do you suppose," wistfully, "you could do it, Althea?"

"No indeed! It would be insulting for me to break such news, with you right in the house."

"Yes; you're right. You've got a real good head," said Miss Beebe distractedly. "You tell me when to go, for I don't seem to feel any judgment about it, somehow."

"Let me look," returned the girl, "and see if Margaret may have fallen asleep. I know she feels exhausted."

She stole to the door of the room. Margaret

was still lying on the divan, her eyes gazing out at the sunset sky. A subtle reflection of its brightness was in her face. Althea marveled at the change and relief that had altered its expression: for Margaret had found that the kernel, the meaning, the crown of life was still left to her,—not lost, as it had seemed in that homeward ride. She was still a girl whose heart might respond to the approaches of a man of honor, and that consideration made an abiding place in a world which else was rocking to its foundations, every belief, tradition, and habit of thought having slipped from its place and left her mind a bewildering chaos. She was not Margaret Carruth. She was somebody else: but she was an honest somebody, and that made the difference between shining hope and black despair.

Althea slipped out into the hall again. "I think it would be better to tell Mrs. Carruth now," she said to Miss Beebe.

"I'd most as lief take and throw myself right out of the window there. If you only knew how that woman has dreaded this day!"

But Miss Luella went downstairs, where she caught sight of her hostess from a window.

Mrs. Carruth beckoned to her. "You are all missing this glorious sunset!" she said. "Do come quick! Did you ever see such living crimson! See those mackerel boats: I've counted thirty going out for the night, and every sail



flushed pink." She took Miss Beebe's arm as she made a sweeping gesture around the horizon.

"It's magnificent, Emeline." Miss Luella patted the fingers on her arm and her voice shook. "The sun's going down on one chapter of your life, dear. There is n't any reason why the next should n't be just as happy. God grant the whole story may be happy!"

"Something has happened, Luella!" Mrs. Carruth's attention was instantly concentrated on her friend.

"Mrs. Darling has told Margaret. Yes, that's right; sit down, Emeline. She's told her what we hoped she need n't ever know; but God will help you both through it, and you must keep up good heart and courage. You" —

"You mean it has nearly killed Margaret." Mrs. Carruth's voice was scarcely audible as she grasped her friend's arm and questioned her with agony in her eyes.

"Mrs. Darling was cruel. She let the child think there was some disgrace about her birth; but she knows the truth now."

"And you've all been talking to her and I've been kept away!" exclaimed Mrs. Carruth, rising distractedly from her chair.

"For the best, Emeline. For the best."

"Oh yes; of course, of course!" The wretched woman caught her lip between her teeth and looked away. To grapple with problems and reduce them

to order was the habit of her life: but this one touched her very soul.

"Don't spare me!" she said at last abruptly, turning back to her friend. "Tell me the state this discovery has left Margaret in before I go to her."

"I don't really know: but I do hope that, as Althea says, things were represented to her so much worse than they really were, that she'll take the facts easier." Miss Beebe's lips compressed with sudden resentment. "I wish you'd let me go with you, Emeline. I was so flustered, and she fainted"—

"My poor darling!"

"—that I didn't say the things on your side that I might have. I just stood there trembling, when I might have been representing your situation."

"It is just as well. Margaret will comprehend and grasp everything."

Miss Beebe watched her friend's pale and abstracted countenance with a sort of awe. It was characteristic in Mrs. Carruth that she did not mention Mrs. Darling, nor indulge in one fruitless moan.

The upper edge of the sun's crimson disk slipped below the horizon.

"It's cold out here, Emeline. Come inside, dear."

"The sun has gone down on my happy mother-

hood, Luella. I am going upstairs now to talk with another woman whom I know well, — clear-eyed, honest, uncompromising, who will demand of me her old faith in human honesty, and claim her right to govern her life independently of me.”

“Gratitude — gratitude ” — stammered Miss Luella.

“Yes, she will feel that punctiliously, and she will be considerate. Oh, the wound of that !” For the first time Mrs. Carruth shuddered and buried her face in her hands.

“Do let me come with you, Emeline. You will never tell that girl all she ought to realize.”

“No, Luella,” was the firm reply ; and then in the dim light Miss Beebe watched her friend, like a suddenly old woman, toiling up the stairs toward Margaret’s room.

The door was closed, and Mrs. Carruth opened it. She saw the figure lying on the divan, and, closing the door behind her, advanced toward it and stood still.

“Margaret,” she began, with gentle abruptness, “no young heart can make you understand the hunger that bade me cheat you with myself into the belief that you were wholly mine. Now my punishment has come, and it is heavy enough for any crime. I am as much your mother as ever. Can you conceive, then, what is lost to me in losing my child ?” The appealing tones died away.

Margaret raised herself from the divan and

stood swaying slightly, supporting herself by a chair as she stood tall in her riding-habit.

"The only relationship that truly binds is left us still," she said tenderly. "Mother, darling mother! What love you have shown me! I am your child still. No one shall rob us of each other!"

Althea Gaylord, pacing back and forth in the hall, heard an exclamation, then stillness fell. She went to a window. The wind blew in freshly from the sea, and the evening star was shining.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### BY THE SEA.

MISS GAYLORD was sitting in her favorite grove, not this time with a book, but out on the water's edge, where the breeze filled her light sleeves.

She had probably been sitting there some time, only that no one kept count of time at Cliff Nest, when somebody came across the bridge behind her and dropped down by her side on the rock.

"Why, Butterfly!" she exclaimed. "How hard you lit!"

French read his welcome in her start and blush of pleasure.

"Oh, how pale you are!" she went on, as he pressed her hand.

"No more so than all the land-lubbers I've left behind me," he returned. "This is the normal color in Boston, but you've been saying 'Yo heave-ho!' so long, you have forgotten. The sun and wind have certainly got in their work on you. I shall have to sing 'My Love is like a red, red rose,' to you."

"You mean, 'My Love, she has a red, red nose,'" returned Althea. "I hope you are going to stay long enough to get one too, you poor lily-white creature."

"You might be kind and call me a lily-white duck."

"Would n't it be fun if we were both ducks? When you came, I was just wishing I was one of those gulls. Their bathing-suits never leak, or look bedraggled when they dip into the waves. Every day I wish I was something different," she turned toward her companion, smiling: "I suppose just because I find it such a lark to be Althea Gaylord."

"Any connection between a gull and a lark?" asked Willard lazily. He had fitted himself into a gully in the rock and was leaning on his elbow.

"The gulls seem to find that there is. They do have the best sport. Sometimes I decide to be a sandpiper. See them down there now, running over the boulders and pebbles?"

"I could if I moved, but I would n't move for a farm — I mean for a yacht. Pardon the lapse from local color."

"I think I look a good deal like a sandpiper, anyway," declared Althea pensively. "My nose is long and thin, and I'm a light sort of a thing generally."

"Very well, I'll look at you then. It is less trouble and more satisfaction."

"I'd rather you would n't. You'll grow too envious of my complexion."

"No, I have some smoked glasses with me if my eyes are n't equal to the strain. You are n't

such a light weight as you were, Althea," he observed critically after a moment, in which her rudeness had been steadily increasing.

"Miss Gaylord, if you please."

"No airs, my ward, just because you happen to have been away some time from your natural protector."

"You never called me Althea, my guardian," scornfully. "You were always far too busy teaching me to say 'prunes and prisms.' I should n't have allowed it, any way," she added as an afterthought.

"Is that true?" he inquired lazily. "Did n't I? Then I must have been doing it since you left Boston. A man gets into careless habits when he is left to his own devices. It's a pretty name — Althea. Name of a flower, is n't it?"

"Yes; and no flower of the field could have been lazier than I have been here," she went on, finding his prolonged gaze decidedly embarrassing. "You know I am naturally industrious."

"To a fault."

"Well, I've struck the average now. I don't just know why it is so tempting and easy to do absolutely nothing here."

"Nature doesn't want to do anything in winter; we don't want to do anything in summer," suggested Willard. "Ask me a hard one."

"That may be it, for I've decided that it is just because Nature is so busy all around me that

I don't want to do a thing but watch her. What would any little energy of mine amount to in comparison with the things the waves and clouds and winds are doing all the time? So I just sit under a spell, hour after hour" —

"I don't think you sit under anything. It has n't been of any account to shade you, if you have."

"Will you kindly stop personal remarks, you very citified person? Where are your golf clothes?"

"In my dress suit-case."

"Don't tell me you are parted from that dress suit!"

"Temporarily."

"No wonder you look pale. Who are you visiting, anyhow?"

"Whom, my child."

"Who isn't slang, and I shall say it all I like."

"I'm visiting you."

"What house are you staying at, or are you just a tramp? When did you come? Have you seen Magnet?"

"I found the house deserted. The maid said this was one of the likeliest places for dear-stalking, so here I am."

"You have reached Cliff Nest at a very interesting period," said Althea mysteriously. "We are having a honeymoon."



Willard's eyes, which had grown narrow and sleepy in the vitalized air, opened.

"How is that? Guests? Then I can go over to Mrs. Darling's first."

"Don't mention her!" ejaculated Miss Gaylord sharply.

"Bless me!" commented French.

"She has done all she could to make trouble, and it is n't her fault that it came to nothing."

"What has the lively Molly been up to now?"

"I don't know that I can tell you."

"Trouble between Magnet and some one of her admirers? Honeymoon? That has nothing to do with Magnet, and her friends uninformed, I should hope."

"It is between Magnet and her mother," said Althea gravely. "They passed through a deep trouble caused by Mrs. Darling, and owing to their own good feeling and sense have escaped shipwreck. They are in the reaction of happiness, having regained each other after the trouble."

French raised himself. "You don't mean to say that Mrs. Darling told" — he stopped, and Althea had never seen such a look on his face.

"Yes, she did!" The girl nodded emphatically.

"What did she tell?" he asked cautiously.

"I wonder if you know," responded Althea with equal caution. "Lots of people do, it seems; but I did n't."

"It was that, then. Great heavens!" He made the ejaculation slowly and thoughtfully, dwelling on all that must have passed. "Miss Beebe was here?" he asked after a minute.

"Yes." Althea sighed at her memories.

"And Magnet has come out of it all right?"

"Yes. She and her mother go to walk and have long talks, and are more demonstrative together than I have ever known them."

"Amazing! I feared it would kill her if it ever came."

Althea gave a little smile down at the sand-pipers. She had her own theory about Margaret's secret helps.

"Do you ever see Mr. Vandyke?" she asked, after they had both sat quiet for a little space.

"Yes, occasionally. You think I'm a lily-white duck, — you ought to see him. He's a lily-white ghost of himself. The man's working himself to death."

"Foolish creature! Why doesn't he take a vacation?"

"Thinks he can't."

"He'll find he can when he has a doctor and a trained nurse taking care of him. Mr. French, you ought to attend to that."

"I said all I could."

"Where there's a will there's a way. You should have brought him; and look here: I want you to tell him what Mrs. Darling has done."

“Why this malice?”

“I think if he weren't bound by his promise to visit her, he would like to come here.”

French smiled. “You think the Magnet works again, do you?”

“I do think so, and as I don't *know* anything about it, it isn't wrong for me to talk to you about it, is it?” Althea met her companion's eyes wistfully.

“Highly commendable, I think. I've had some curious thoughts about this myself.”

So Althea, with much gusto, again described the scene of parting on the train. “Now see how he is running down there in that hot city,” she went on excitedly, “and here the Princess in the castle may be thinking about him. I believe she is. And he knows there is a tawny tigress waiting to spring at him if he shows that beautiful straight nose of his here, and you can see — anybody can see — that it is your duty to cut the tigress's claws. One thing I'll tell you,” went on Althea diplomatically, “in the first of Magnet's trouble, when she thought of leaving Cliff Nest, her impulse was to go straight to you.”

“Bless her!” said French.

“So you can see that Mr. Vandyke, being your friend, if Magnet cares anything for him, you can befriend them both; and as much as she thinks of you, you ought to do it.”

“Evidently, then,” said French, his hands

clasped behind his head, "I ought to go back to the city to-night."

"Why?" asked Althea, and the tone of her voice, after the tense and full one she had been using, suggested that something had happened to deprive her of her breath-support.

"Why, I ought to go and labor with Vandyke."

"I didn't mean there was so much hurry."

"A man with such a beautiful straight nose deserves consideration."

"But you can write to him."

French smiled out at a distant frothy ledge. He had come to Cliff Nest on a voyage of discovery, having himself learned certain surprising facts since Miss Gaylord left Boston.

"Well, I might try writing. Let me tell you something though, my little lady. I prophesy that the Carruths will not ostracize Mrs. Darling, whatever she has done."

"Why not?"

"Pride, regard for her husband, desire to check gossip, — many reasons. A policy which ignores her act will keep her from saying any more, for be sure she is ashamed of herself by this time."

While the two were talking, Miss Beebe, having reached home from some expedition, came across the bridge. Shade hats were not practical on this coast unless reefed and made fast. Miss Beebe's was confined by strings tied under her chin, and the scoop before and behind decorated with rib-

bon ; that in front was drawn into loops which took a singularly pugilistic attitude above her eye-glasses.

She mounted the needle-covered knoll before she discovered that Althea was not alone, and then she stood still, gazing through and over her glasses, grimacing variously in her anxiety to discover the identity of the girl's companion.

Her first thought and hope was Vandyke. The dreaded crisis of Margaret's life was past. Now if its crown could come, here, in Miss Luella's sight and knowledge, there would be a poetical justice, a fitness, a gratification in the whole situation, never to be forgotten.

That straw hat and brown suit might belong to anybody. It baffled her. She stole nearer and nearer, and with every step her hope grew, for French in his lolling attitude was a vague figure mingling with the rocks.

The sound of the surf deadened any token of Miss Luella's advance among the dry twigs, until she was beside the young people.

"Willard French, is that you?" she exclaimed in her disappointment. "I thought you were Mr. Vandyke."

He started to his feet. "I ought to be. I am profoundly aware that I am the wrong man in the right place. Miss Gaylord feels just as you do. Oh, why have n't I a beautiful straight nose!"

"My dear Willard," said Miss Beebe con-

trite, "we're very glad to see you, of course. You know *that*."

"I don't see why I should know it. I never was a good guesser."

"Why, of course we are! Althea, say something! It was only that Mr. Vandyke talked about coming and -- O Willard, has Althea told you what has happened?"

French admitted that she had, and Miss Luella immediately began giving him directions as to circumventing Mrs. Darling in her nefarious schemes to be Vandyke's hostess.

"Yes, yes, I've heard all that, and you're wasting ammunition, for Vandyke has given up visiting her."

"There! You hear, Althea?" triumphantly.

But Miss Luella's elation oozed out on second thought. "Supposing, then, that he felt he couldn't come at all!" she ended blankly.

"That's just what he feels," said French, "and his decision seems so tragical in its effects that I am about to return to the Hub and send him on at once to tan that classical proboscis of his, while my own broken feature retains its pallor unhonored and unsung, or grows red from other causes."

"Indeed you won't! It's tea-time, and you come right along to the house and see how pleased the Carruths will be to see you."

Miss Beebe managed to draw Althea behind as they were crossing the narrow bridge. "I think

Willard does feel a little hurt," she whispered. "You must make of him."

Her direction evidently seemed such a definite one to the giver of it that its vagueness made Althea smile.

French found himself in the centre of a happy family circle that night. It was good to be in touch with the indefinable sphere of peace and love and confidence that he felt, and he spoke of it to Althea when late in the evening they two took a constitutional around the long piazzas.

She assented. "It is as if they had been on the brink of a great loss," she answered, "as if they had snatched each other back from the grave. They are still in the thankfulness of it."

She stood still, because her escort did, at the point in their walk which brought them nearest to the high, powerful tide. "Let us watch it here a minute," he said.

She sprang lightly up on the piazza rail, and he leaned beside her against one of the colonial pillars that supported the portico.

"I have something to say to you," he began; and Althea's heart commenced to beat apprehensively.

"No, not now, not yet," she said impulsively.

"Why not?"

"Because — because everything is so pleasant and I'm so happy, and — really, I have n't the least idea what I've done."

French watched her in the vague light.

"What do you think you've done?"

"Oh, I suppose I said something that jarred, or I did something you didn't like. 'Where ignorance is bliss, 't is folly to be wise.' I'd rather pretend to-night that you think I am perfect."

"Agreed! We'll do it. There is only one condition."

"Name it!" said Althea, in the soft drawl, half-laugh, she often used, and which, from considering it objectionable, French had come to think the prettiest mannerism on earth.

"That you pretend to think that I am perfect too."

"Oh, who dares doubt that? Mr. Willard French, the glass of fashion and mould of form; the ladies' delight, the leader of Germans, the authority on etiquette" —

"Look here! Don't you represent me to your father like that!"

"What has Dad to do with it?" asked Althea in surprise.

"Why, I am hoping to have some dealings with him."

"Indeed? How interesting!" The girl's pleased tone changed to one of thoughtful warning. "You'd better look out, though, Butterfly. Dad's a — a — Oh, how in the world are you going to say 'hustler' in Bostonese?" She shook her head portentously. "I'm afraid your delib-



erate ways would n't stand much chance with Dad."

"You are making me extremely uncomfortable," said French. "I don't suppose you know it. And you're not keeping your part of the compact, either."

"Are you really thinking of coming out West?" asked Althea, whose thoughts and pulses were bounding. "I tell you, it's a good place for young men. Lots of chances for positions compared to the East."

"The trouble is with me, I'm so fastidious," said French. "There's only one position I care about getting. No other would hold out the slightest inducement."

"Is it with Dad?" asked Althea, more and more surprised.

"Yes."

"Better tell me, then. There are n't many people can do anything with Dad, but I'm one who can; and if it is a position where my influence would count for anything, or I could have a word to say" — she paused.

"You could."

"Then I will," said the girl promptly. "There's my hand on it."

French's grasp closed on the small fingers. "This is just what I want," he remarked.

"Well, tell the rest. The position is" —

"Son-in-law," replied French quietly.

“What — what?” gasped Althea.

“Will you keep your word? Will you use your influence?”

“What if I won’t?” she asked confusedly, wishing she had a hand at liberty to pinch herself, but her companion was holding them both.

“Then I should have to go out alone and beard the lion in his den.”

“But Dad has n’t any daughter except me,” said Althea feebly.

“Did you think I wanted to be a Mormon?”

“But you don’t approve of me.”

“I want about fifty years’ time in which to show you that I do.”

“Willard! Althea! Willard!” It was Miss Beebe, groping near-sightedly along the piazza a few minutes afterward, and almost upon them, as she called.

“Present!” responded French, so unexpectedly near that she uttered a faint shriek.

“It is cold, Willard,” she said accusingly. “Where is Althea?”

“Here, in my arms.”

“What!” severely. “What in the world!”

“You told me to make of him,” said Althea demurely, “and he does n’t feel hurt any longer.”

“Come, Miss Beebe,” French extended a hand to her. “It’s quite right you should be in this. You made the match.”

“So I did!” ejaculated Miss Luella, her heart

beating in a delighted reaction. "No," with sudden caution, "I did not! I'll never admit it, never, till I know what Mrs. Gaylord says. Oh, you dear children!" She kissed them both tenderly, — Willard on the chin, and Althea in the eye, owing to the darkness and her excitement. "May you have all the happiness I wish for you! Heaven bless you both!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE ONE QUESTION

THIS new happiness that had had its birth at Cliff Nest was felt as pleasantly by Mrs. Carruth and Margaret as by Miss Luella.

It was Mrs. Carruth's own idea that she should write a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Gaylord, to go in the same mail with Althea's and Willard's.

"Willard has no mother to speak for him," she explained, and Althea nearly wept from gratitude. This was one of the many cases where Mrs. Carruth's word would have weight.

"What can we ever do for these people?" the girl said to Willard. "One thing we can refrain from doing, and that is to tell them about poor Mr. Vandyke. They like him enough to be troubled by what you say of him. I'm sure."

"I don't want to pry," returned French, "but I'd like to know if Magnet shares the general feminine admiration for Vandyke?"

"I hope she will get over it if she does," returned Althea. "The idea of his not coming to see her here!"

"Oh! You didn't talk that way yesterday."

"No. Yesterday was" — Althea hesitated

and looked at him in a confiding way, which would have made French take her hand, except that he had it already; as it was he merely squeezed it. "Yesterday was different," she finished.

"Now I'm to know what you really think, then?"

"Yes. I really think he does n't care so much as I supposed if he actually lets any matter of business," this with vast scorn, "prevent him from coming here all summer."

"Well, let us wait. The summer is n't very old yet."

That is what Margaret considered also. Her bringing-up had not looked toward a sudden gratifying of her wishes. It was second nature to her to expect that the needs and demands of others were to be met and satisfied before her own plans could be carried out. So whatever was preventing Vandyke from appearing at Spindrift at the date his hostess expected him, she took it for granted that it was an important claim, and still looked forward with faith and patience.

She spent much time in the seat among the ledges, with her work or a book or merely her thoughts. Not often did she distress herself with memories of her scene with Mrs. Darling. It had been so paralyzing in its effects at the time that in reminiscence it seemed more like nightmare than reality; but often her thoughts dwelt on the young unknown father and mother who lay sleeping in

the country cemetery, and imagination traced the possible trend of her life had they lived. Her voice would probably have been discovered just the same. She could have earned her living with it, could perhaps have attained fame. Why, then, did not that vista of freedom allure her excitingly and wistfully? She knew, sitting there gazing out on the interminable waste of bright water. She knew that it was because in that case she never would have known —

“Magnet!” called Althea. The latter had finally been told of her friend’s guarded retreat, and as she never ventured to it except by invitation unless in case of necessity, Margaret started up.

“Some one to see you,” said the newcomer across the ledge.

“Who?”

“I don’t know. Sex female, color white, age about thirty, size small, no cards.”

“And no name?”

“She said you did n’t know her, so it would n’t make any difference.”

“It’s an agent, Althea. Why did n’t you dispose of her?”

“Oh, no, indeed she is n’t! She’s a dainty little thing, and her gown is so pretty! I wish you would notice how her jacket is made; I’d like to have one just like it, and I did n’t have time to examine. I knew you would n’t want to see anybody, but I had n’t the heart to excuse

you. She has come all the way from the hotel in a cab."

"Why, it's just a caller, then." Margaret gathered herself out of her mood of Arcadian dreaming and slipped on the familiar harness of society. "What amazing energy some people have!" she sighed meekly, with an apologetic smile at Althea for her own inhospitality.

The two girls, their arms about each other, moved toward the house. "What have you done with your shadow?" asked Margaret.

"He has gone to get out a boat. We are going rowing. Oh, Magnet!" with an impulsive hug, "did you ever hear of such a fortunate creature as I? I wish I had as romantic a home for you to become engaged in. Nothing else would ever pay my debt to you."

Margaret smiled. "All places are romantic under certain circumstances," she answered. They reached the piazza and exchanged a look of happy significance, Margaret taking her friend's chin and turning her face up for playful examination.

"You're the dearest thing on earth, Magnet Carruth!" said Althea, in an access of admiration for the clear, true eyes and strong, reposeful face.

Margaret laughed. "You say that so glibly, I suspect you've been rehearsing. Good-by. Don't let Willard forget to row, or you will be late to tea."

She went into the house, and Althea skipped away, with a last look over her shoulder.

In the deep embrasure of one of the windows of the living-room sat a small blonde woman, waiting. She was not looking out at the spacious views, nor about her at the graceful, fanciful furnishing of the seashore home. Her eyes were riveted on the door, and when Margaret entered they fastened upon her with as eager scrutiny as if life depended on a mastery of the newcomer's face and features.

"Miss Carruth, I suppose?" she said, rising.

Margaret assented and advanced.

"My name is Sterling, Edna Sterling;" then as an afterthought, "have you ever heard it?"

"I believe not."

"I thought so. I have come a long way to see you."

"Yes; it is some distance to the hotel."

"I have come much further than that. Is there some place where we can be entirely alone?"

Margaret regarded her guest in surprise. "Right here, I think."

"It — it seems so large and open."

Margaret began to believe the little woman was astray in her mind, — she had such a strained and yet childlike look about the eyes that scrutinized so eagerly. Her manner, however, was gentle and refined, her face expressive, and she evidently believed herself on an important errand.



"Be quite easy," returned Margaret, "you can say whatever you wish here."

She seated herself in the window, and the stranger, with a last look about her surroundings, rather reluctantly took the place beside her.

She looked directly into Margaret's eyes for a silent space, then she spoke softly.

"I have come all the way from Philadelphia to ask you one question. Do you love Burton Vanddyke?"

In her amazement Miss Carruth half rose from her chair, then sank back again, and a deep color dyed her face and throat.

"What do you mean by that question?" she said.

The visitor shook her head slowly. "Nothing that need make you angry. Indeed, you should not be angry," she said gently.

"It is a question he has never asked me," said Margaret, recovering herself, and certain now that her visitor's reason was unbalanced, possibly through the very emotion she sought to find here.

"Of course he has not," was the quiet answer. "I knew that. He has been engaged to me for five years."

The speaker's tone was genuine. Margaret realized it now, and every particle of strength forsook her body as she lay back in her chair.

"Yes — yes, I was right," said the guest, eyeing her pallor and nodding thoughtfully; "you do

love him." She waited half a minute, during which, though Margaret essayed to speak, no sound would come, while her life seemed ebbing away, further and further.

"Are you going to faint?" asked the stranger. "Don't. We have so much to talk over, and things will come out right for you." She leaned forward and took one of Margaret's hands. "For two months I have been as you are now. You see I look old to-day, although I am but twenty-five; but I have arrived at the place now where I can act. This seemed the first thing to do. Isn't it strange what suffering can come to people when nobody is to blame? Burton and I would have been married long ago except that he had relatives to support while he was getting started. When he had the position offered him in Boston, we saw the end of our waiting. In the case of every pair they say there is one who loves and one who is loved. I always knew that in our case I was the one who loved; but I was satisfied. I think the loving one is the happier?" She put it as a question, and she regarded her listener with such appealing gentleness, holding her hand all the time between her own two little gloved ones, that Margaret assented with a slight nod.

"It was a month after he met you before I began to suspect from his letters that he was growing to love you. He didn't know it himself till long afterward. He told me all about you in

reply to my questioning when he came home on a visit, and I did not dare tell him what I feared, thinking that perhaps, God willing, I might escape ; but the next time we met, I saw that he had arrived at an understanding of himself. It was on the night of your concert that the crisis came. He would never have told me, any more than he would you ; but I made him. I questioned him. Poor Burton ! ”

The speaker averted her gaze and fell silent. Margaret's faintness had passed, and her thoughts were wonderfully lucid. Her talk with Miss Beebe on the day when she had exploited her theories came back to her.

“ I don't see why you came to me,” she said at last. “ Does Mr. Vandyke know that you are here ? ”

“ Do you understand him so little ? ” asked Miss Sterling wonderingly, looking up at her. “ I want to ask you this favor,” she went on after a silence. “ I want to ask you never to tell him I came, but my reason for coming was plain enough. If you did not love him, then where would be the use of my giving him up ? ” She asked it so simply, with a smile of interrogation, that Margaret was painfully touched.

“ You are not going to give him up,” she replied quickly.

The visitor shook her head.

“ You do not believe that I love him, or you

would n't say that. I fought against it at first. I tried to think I need n't, especially as he — Oh, Miss Carruth, if you knew how beautifully and tenderly he talked to me, it would have made you care more for him than ever."

At this point the little woman did drop her head and lift her handkerchief to her eyes. In an instant, however, she smiled, looking up through the bright drops. "There are always more tears," she said apologetically, "even when one is sure they must all be shed."

"Mr. Vandyke wishes to marry you. I honor him for it," said Margaret.

"That shows that you are as noble as he is." Miss Sterling regarded Margaret afresh. "I see you are going to understand, and know that he never dreamed of making you care for him. He does not believe you do. I felt sure you must, and so I came to see before I decided irrevocably. He says that you are set apart from average people by your great gift: that you will belong to the whole world; but he — he is set apart from average people too, by many gifts. Oh, Miss Carruth, I have had five blissfully happy years! Not every woman can say as much?" She looked again with the questioning appeal at Margaret, whose pain was very great as she smiled back again.

"Mr. Vandyke is right," she said composedly; "my lot cannot be one of domestic happiness."

"But there is no other that can fill a woman's

heart." The quick reply met an unspoken passionate assent in the soul of the listener.

To Margaret, grown old in the last ten minutes, it seemed that her whole life had been a preparation for this hour. Why should this little, tender, confiding creature be sacrificed to her? What happiness could there be for Vandyke in allowing any cause but death to prevent him from fulfilling his promise to her?

The blue eyes, unconscious of their own pathos, were studying her face, and it was a very gentle and protecting gesture with which Margaret replied: —

"Somebody has said that we are nowhere commanded to be happy. I have for years been watching for signs to indicate if it were my mission to sing. See this, now, that has come."

A quick breath like a sob caught in the other's throat. "Don't tempt me!" she exclaimed. "Help me. Oh, Miss Carruth, you are thinking of me! Let us think only of Burton."

By a spontaneous, mutual movement, her head was suddenly on Margaret's breast and Margaret's arms were around her.

"I shall make it easy for him," went on the soft, eager voice. "When he knows that you do care for him, it will all come about naturally."

Margaret's eyes, large and dim, looked over the speaker's head, through the window, out upon the sea.

"Perhaps, after all, I understand him the better," she said. "I don't know your circumstances, or what you would have left if you gave him up."

"I should have the knowledge of his happiness," was the quick reply. "It would be all that I cared for, no matter what else in the world was mine."

"Then if you did not have that knowledge, you would be poor indeed."

"It is the thing that could kill me."

"Very well. I am sure his happiness could not be gained by giving you up."

"That is because you do not know how cheerfully I will behave with him." Miss Sterling raised herself, the better to look convincingly into her rival's face.

Margaret smiled at her with unsteady lips, and presently she spoke:—

"What are your plans?"

"To go back to the hotel at Crest View and spend the night, and to-morrow to go to Boston and see Burton."

"I think you would better stay with me for a while instead. No words can tell you, Miss Sterling, how you surprise me by your broad and unselfish treatment of me."

"But nobody was to blame," explained the other simply.

"That does n't always make a difference."

"No. It did n't at first with me. I was very

wicked at first. I came out of a battle that was weeks long, to come here. I knew Burton had told me the exact truth, and yet when I saw a little while ago how I shocked you, I knew all at once what a blow this new knowledge was to perhaps your whole life's plan. I couldn't have borne to wound you so if I had n't known that you could be comforted again."

"I believe you will give up that thought." Margaret spoke now with calmness. "Mr. Vandyke told you of my musical success. The career has always been one of the greatest interest to me." She went on at length, raking over the dead ashes that were left to her, to convince her rival that the sparks of fire which were left were sufficient to kindle again a blaze that would cheer and warm her life. "I have never felt certain that it was right for me to bury my gift. Now God's finger points the way."

Miss Sterling listened wistfully, doubtfully.

"But we are leaving out Burton. How can we tell without Burton?" she said.

"Very well," returned Margaret quietly. "Let us send for him to come here."

In a few minutes it was settled; a messenger was sent to the hotel for Miss Sterling's luggage, and Cliff Nest had another guest.

Margaret found her mother in her room, rising from one of those afternoon naps which were restoring that vital force which would help move

the world along next winter. "I am lazier than usual to-day!" she said, laughing, as the girl came in. "No wonder you came to see what was the matter. Margaret, what is it? What has happened?" The speaker, the long hair she had just unloosed falling around her, walked quickly forward to meet her daughter, who laid a hand on each of her shoulders and looked back into her eyes.

"Mother" — she began, bravely smiling, but her voice would not serve her. "O mother," she moaned, sinking into the ready arms, "the light has gone out!"

Mrs. Carruth held her closely, waiting. The danger which had been so long foreseen, the dreaded rock ahead in her life, had been safely passed: then what was this?

"Mr. Vandyke!" she murmured after an instant in the ear so close to her.

"He is engaged," said Margaret.

The mother's heart beat fast.

"Another mistake, dear!" she exclaimed. "It must be."

"No. His fiancée is here."

"Here still? Here now?" asked Mrs. Carruth sharply.

"Don't use that tone," returned the girl brokenly. "She is here because I asked her to stay. She is a gentle little child, and of such is the kingdom of heaven."



They sat down together on the edge of the bed, and Margaret told her mother all.

"You are going to send for him!" repeated Mrs. Carruth at last. "My darling, you tax yourself too cruelly."

"It is the only way. Otherwise Miss Sterling will go to him and tell him that I—even if I could use arguments to convince her that it was better not, she could not help it. She is too transparent, too unselfish. I must do it. When you know her, you will say so too. It is the supreme moment of my life, mother. No one can help me but you, and no one could help me as you can."

"Margaret, are n't you perhaps making a great, great mistake? I have heard you give your opinion that a man situated as Mr. Vandyke is now should, in spite of all obstacles, marry the woman he loves."

"I know," a spasmodic sob convulsed Margaret's breast; "but this sweet girl has given him five years of her life. She loves him absolutely. What happiness could come to any of us from ignoring her rights? He feels so, or he would have come to Cliff Nest before this. What might change him would be her representations if I let her see him before I do. He might be convinced. He might not be able to withstand"—a dry sob again wrenched the girl's breast and stopped her speech.

The two sat in silence for half a minute. Margaret was first to speak.

"Mother, there will be a consequence upon this matter that you will have to face. Dear, noble mother," the girl embraced her tenderly, "one sacrifice will be of no avail without the other. Mr. Vandyke believes that I shall sing. Miss Sterling will marry him, believing that that will fill my life."

Her tone broke down Mrs. Carruth's strong self-control. She bowed her head and wept quietly. "God grant it may, Margaret! Yours is a great love. I will not refuse to do my part."

## CHAPTER XX

### AT SUNSET

MARGARET understood the anxiety it would cause Vandyke should she send him word that Miss Sterling was at Cliff Nest. She therefore merely wrote, asking him to give her a day as soon as opportunity offered, and stating that she needed his advice.

He responded with a telegram, and the following day, at evening, Margaret, sitting alone upon the piazza, saw his cab drive into the grounds.

In the minute before it stopped at the steps near her, the girl prayed as she had never in her life prayed, for strength, wisdom, and self-control.

The sunset sky, azure still from the day's loveliness, was painted with a broad brush in giant swirls of rose and crimson. The vast spaces of heaven above and earth beneath were awe-inspiring, and Vandyke stood long beside Margaret watching the subtle and grand changes as they fell.

"You look as if you needed this," she said at last.

"I was glad of a necessity to bring me," he answered.

He still looked at the sea as he spoke. The girl had not yet been able to hold his glance. He, too, had come fortified, and his gravity and dignity made Margaret's heart flutter momentarily with doubts.

She stilled them with an upward look. His self-control should merely be a prop to her own, not frighten her from her purpose.

"You must take in great draughts of inspiration here, Miss Carruth. Here are the color, the breadth, one feels in your singing."

Margaret looked back at the opaline ocean. What rest to be with him again! What sympathy! For a minute she let herself rest in it, drifting irresponsibly, like the dreaming wave that bathed in purple and rose as it flowed silently toward the beach.

"I have been hoping that we should see you here of your own accord," she said at last. "On the day of our hurried parting on the train, did you not expect to come?"

"No. I had already discovered that I must not attempt it."

"Perhaps it is as well that you did not tell me so. I have had the pleasure of anticipation."

"You are very kind." How cold Vandyke's tone sounded to himself! It seemed to him that he was holding down by sheer force of will the slight barrier which was his only safeguard against

the tumult of feeling that surged in him again at Margaret's actual proximity.

"I must ask you to tell me this evening what it is that has procured for me the honor of your message, for I need to return to Boston at the earliest moment."

Margaret's eyes were fixed on him, and she saw his lips tremble. He raised his hand and smoothed his mustache.

The maternal instinct that is in every woman's love yearned over him. Why should she yield to timidity or dread? It was her part to help him in sore need. The shyness, the passivity of happier girls were things she could have no part in. She must turn her back on petty considerations and be strong.

"I sent for you," she said, "because Miss Sterling has visited me."

Vandyke's nervous start was evident. His hand dropped, but still he did not turn his face in her direction. "Why did she come?" he asked, and his voice was hard.

"For love of you," answered Margaret.

There was an instant's silence. "Miss Carruth," he said at last, "it has sometimes seemed very strange to me that I never spoke of Miss Sterling to you. I had no reason for maintaining silence excepting that I had no right to suppose that you all, who so kindly took in a stranger, would be interested in his connections."

"I think the fault was largely mine," returned the girl. "I kept my own affairs uppermost when we were together."

"You think it was a fault, then?" he demanded.

"It was a misfortune."

"Why?"

Now was Margaret's need for strength. "It was a misfortune for me. It would have changed my thoughts toward you," she returned simply and bravely, "to know that you were engaged."

Her implication stole slowly, intoxicatingly into Vandyke's comprehension. Now he turned toward her, and such ecstacy Margaret had never seen in a man's eyes. She perceived that as the suspicion, the fact, mastered him, he was forgetting all else. He breathed her name and took a step forward.

"That is why Miss Sterling came," she added with instinctive quickness. "She came to find out what she could best do to make you happy. She is an angel of unselfishness."

Vandyke laid a hand on a pillar near him, and his strong frame trembled as realization of the situation returned to him, but his gaze still rested on Margaret.

"She surprised the truth from me," the girl went on, "and so I knew" — the breath left her for a second in the difficulty of her task — "I knew I must see you before she did, — see you to tell you how I honor you for your decision."

“Can I make her happy?” he ejaculated. “It is my last question at night and my first each morning.”

“Yes; for you will be happy yourself in doing the right.”

The sun was almost gone, and its last rays showed Margaret's face with the look of exaltation it wore when she sang.

“But now that I know — what I know” — said Vandyke, his breathing labored.

The girl smiled straight into his eyes, an inspired certainty in her own, so clear and true.

“You are passing through the worst now,” she said. “There is one hope of blessedness even in this world: it is in doing right. You have held to it so far with splendid strength that is an inspiration to me. It is going to continue to be an inspiration to me. We shall be able to think of each other without the pursuit of those sweet blue eyes that would if we — if we yielded, become the avenging sadness of our lives. Let us both love her and take care of her; she has been so patient and true. I will go into the world and sing. You will go into the world and work. Do you think there will be no reward for this? Indeed, indeed there will! She is here now, ready to forego everything, ready to make us happy in any way she can. When you tell her what is for our real happiness, she will believe you, and she will make such a heaven about you in her gratitude that you

will see what her loss would have been. But you knew this before I said it. You had determined on your course."

They looked at each other in silence, and something in his eyes made Margaret continue, slowly, solemnly, as one speaks who takes a vow: "You will always be to me what you are now. I shall always look toward you as I look now, even though oceans divide us."

His hand on the pillar had slowly lost its rigid grasp. "That must not be, Margaret," he answered.

She smiled at him with confident sweetness. "It will be *because* it must be," she said simply.

And so in many lands a woman, whose presence is a benediction, carries the message it has been given her to sing.

If it be a hymn of fatherland that employs her ringing tones, the patriot spirit revives in the most enervated breast. If sacred strains lead up from earth to heaven, the multitude are ready to follow, so true is the force that leads the way.

Love songs fly from her heart straight to that of every lover, thrilling with fresh, strong inspiration toward purer, loftier feeling.

Her lullabies! One happy blue-eyed mother goes home from them to shed tears of renewed, unutterable joy over her own darlings, realizing



that she has heard voiced that universal motherhood which would enfold each tired child of earth.

The love that soothes and strengthens, the love that looks up and inspires, that never despairs and always believes, — that gift is Margaret's. It has found and brought rest to her pure soul, for "greater love hath no man than this."

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